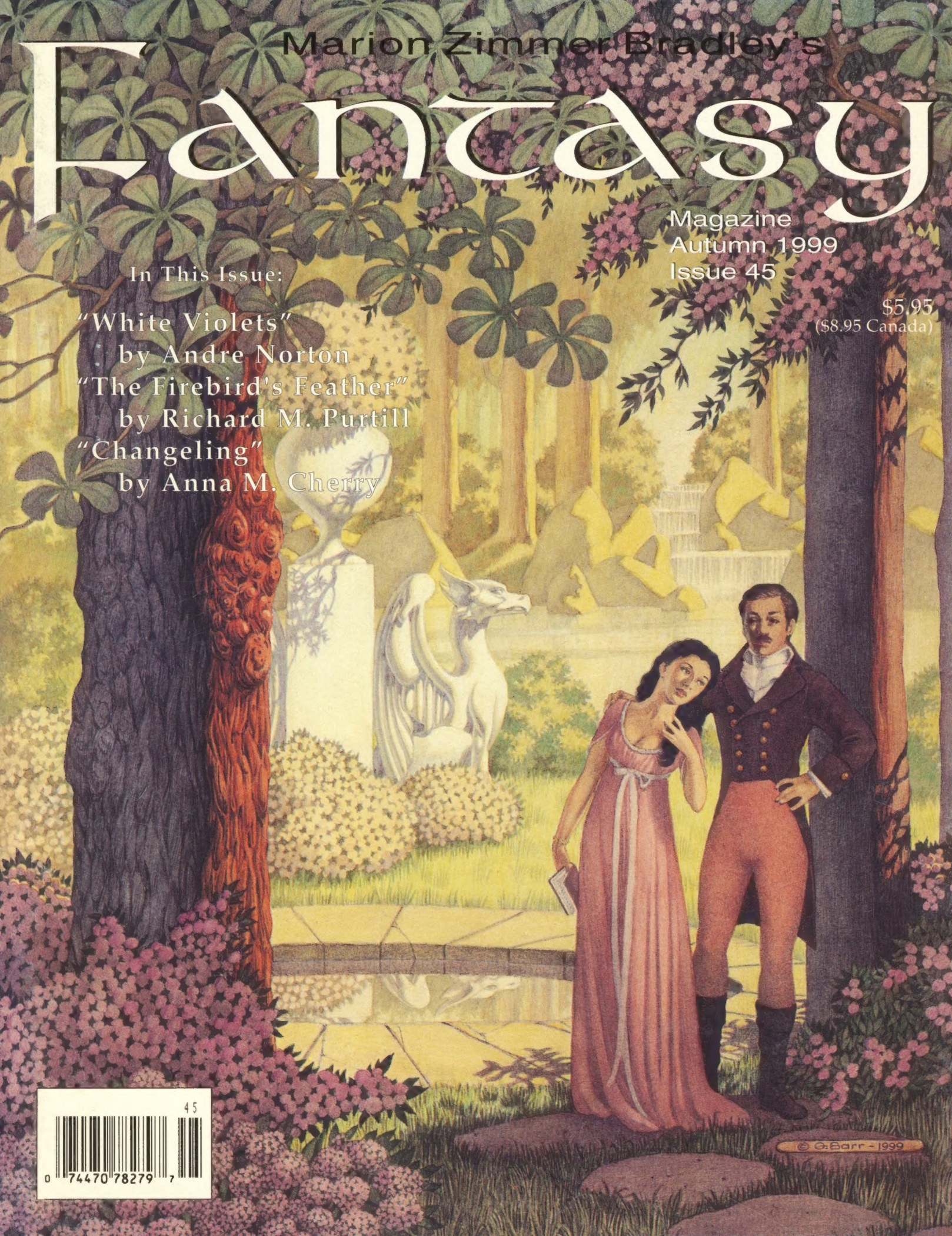
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Fantasy
Magazine
Autumn 1999
Issue 45
$5.95
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by Andre Norton
"The Firebird's Feather"
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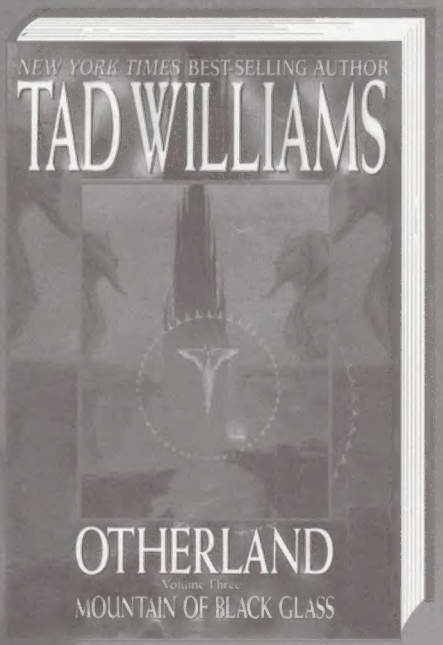

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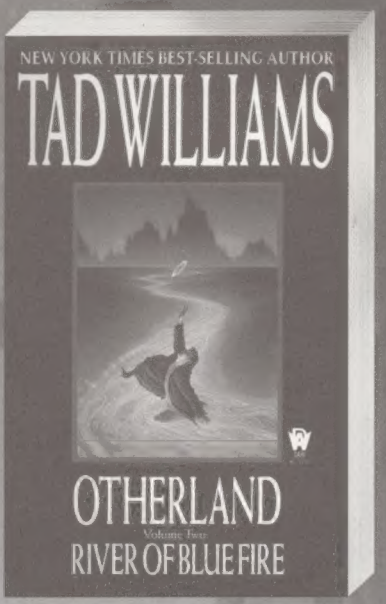

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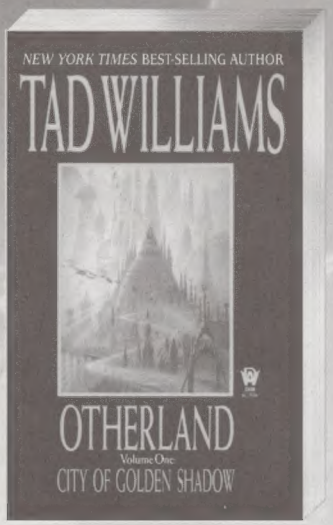

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Marion Zimmer Bradley's
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EDITORIAL

The Importance of Discipline

The best thing about being a writer is that nobody is going to follow you around and tell you what to do. The worst thing about being a writer is that nobody is going to follow you around and tell you what to do. You really have to start out knowing what you're going to do, and have a large internal generator, and it helps if you have an overdeveloped sense of conscience — you have to feel faintly guilty whenever you're not working. Nobody's going to take a whip and drive you to the typewriter. You have to develop the ability to start up by yourself.

You can keep a notebook of ideas that occur to you. When I start a story, I take a page in a notebook and write down everything I can think about it. It helps if you can't help writing, even if you're not getting paid for it. Redd Boggs and I once exchanged a pair of fifty-page letters. If you can't write a single page without worrying about it, my question to you is, "Have you thought of knitting afghans? Or making teddy bears?"

You should be able to sum up a story in one sentence. Of course the basic plot is that a man wants to accomplish something, against everything the world, the flesh, and the devil can throw at him, and either he does it or he doesn't do it. Bonnie Prince Charlie's defeat at Culloden can either be a tragedy or a triumph, depending on what you think. I thought that getting rid of the Stuarts was the best thing that ever happened to Scotland. My mother was a very romantic partisan of the Jacobites, but I have very little use for romantic lost causes.

Being able to finish things is very important. I used to start writing something and then throw it aside and start something else. One day I just sat down and looked at myself very seriously, and I said, "Who am I kidding? Can I finish something or can't I? If I can't finish this, I'll just quit." And I finished it, and it sold, and I've never really lost a sale after that.

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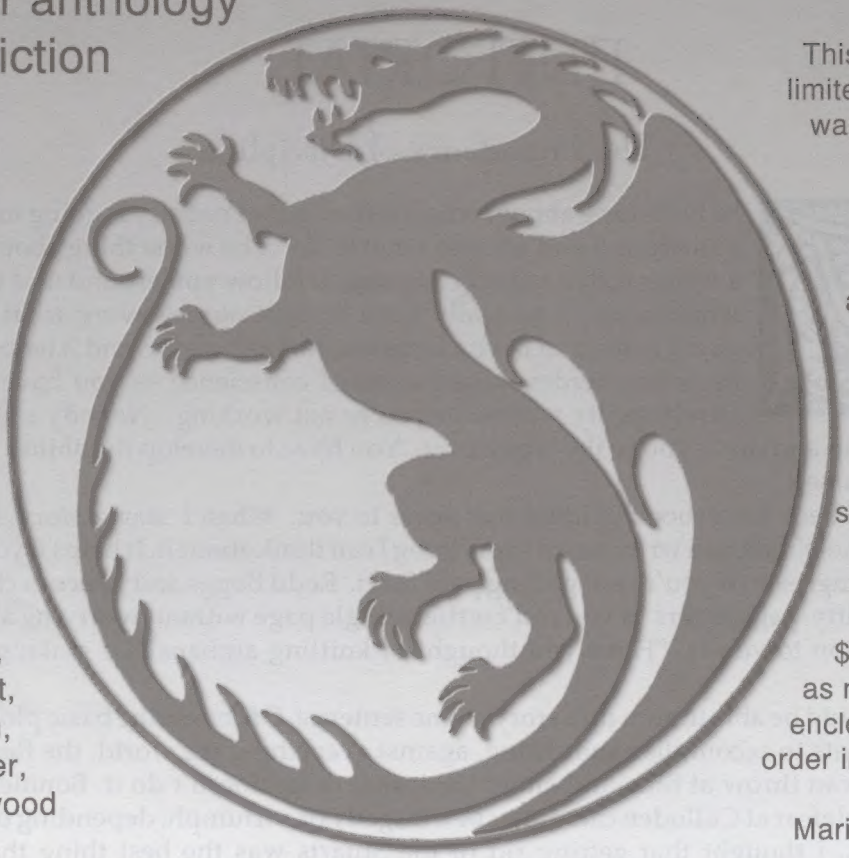

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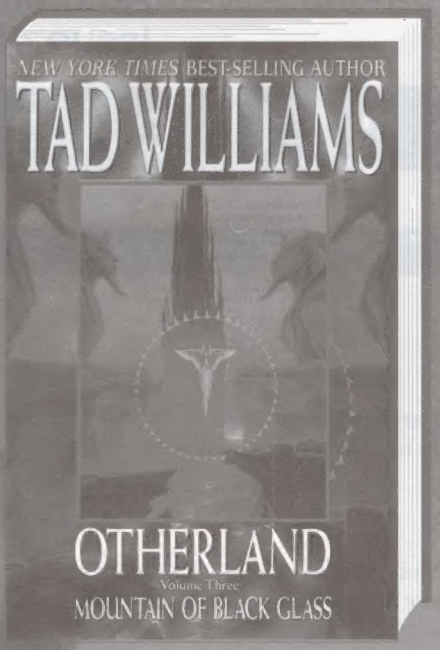

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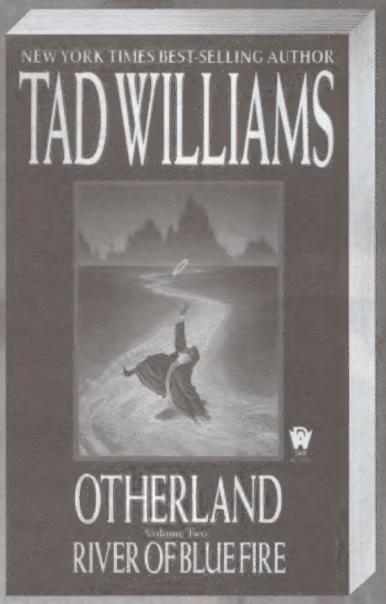

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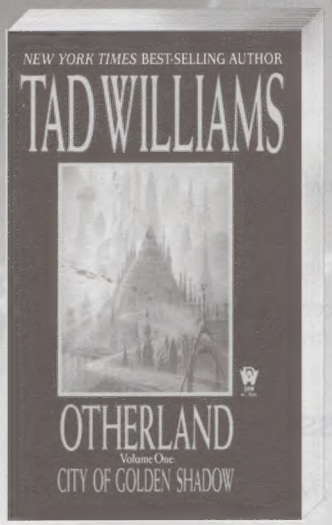

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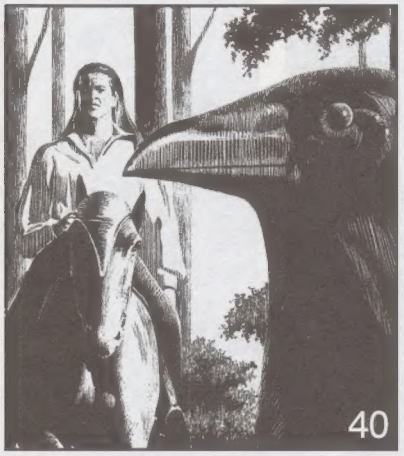

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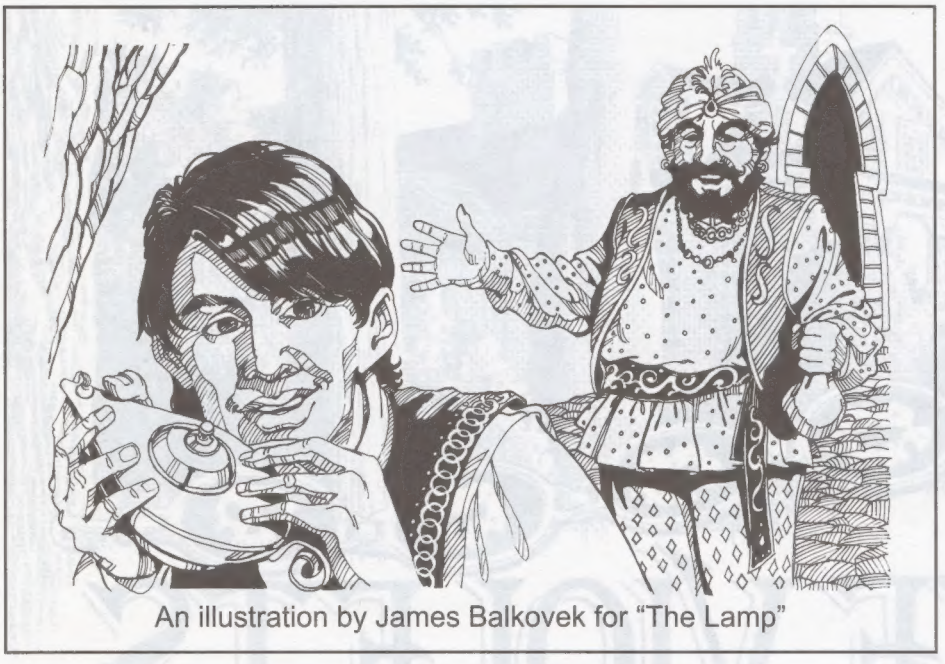

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Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine

Editor Marion Zimmer Bradley
Publisher Rachel E. Holmen
Secretary Elisabeth Waters
Graphic Design Margaret Davis
Proofreading Gil Lamont
Debbie Notkin

Issue #45 • Autumn1999 • Vol. 12 #1

ISSN 0897-9286

Published by:
The Marion Zimmer Bradley Living Trust, P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, California 94701, (510) 644-9222. http://www.mzbfm.com

Submissions:
Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* welcomes free-lance submissions from people who have read our guidelines. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with adequate return postage. *FANTASY Magazine*, a quarterly, publishes original short fiction with fantasy elements in the range of 500 to 5,500 words. The most suitable length and the one most often purchased is between 3,500 and 4,000 words. While every precaution will be taken, we cannot assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts. A duplicate should be retained. Sample copies of the magazine are available for writers and artists at a special rate of $4.00 including postage and handling. Requests for WRITERS' or ARTISTS' GUIDELINES should include a #10 self-addressed stamped envelope.

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Postmaster:
Send address changes to: Marion Zimmer Bradley, P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, CA 94701-0249.

WHITE VIOLETS

by Andre Norton

Dilly was busy making flower-and-leaf bonnets for her two favorite dolls. She was also where she was not to be — in the garden alone. But Mackie, who had ruled her world almost since she was born and Mother had gone to Heaven, had a headache — one of her very bad ones which meant lavender-water cloths on her forehead, a dark room, and *no* noise. And Simpson, her sister's maid, who was supposed to be keeping an eye on her, was busy with Violet's gown to be worn this evening at the big ball.

Dilly pinned two leaves together with thorns and examined the effect. She had been told directly *not* to go into the garden, but here she was, which gave her a sense of adventure. However, she had not ventured far from the Manor — the garden was too large, and besides, Old Buskins, the head gardener, would soon be through with his elevenses. It was best to keep out of sight, which was why she had squirmed back into the bushes.

Only, suddenly, there were voices — one of them quite loud and angry and the other sounding nearly just as sharp, as Violet could speak when she was upset. Dilly dared to pull aside, though for only an inch or so, the branch which hid the newcomers from her.

Yes, it was Violet, though she was supposed to be resting before the ball tonight — the important ball when Papa would announce that she was going to marry Colonel Sir Christopher Hale. Dilly's lips shaped soundlessly that very important name, which Violet and Papa shortened to "Chris."

"It was entirely open to the understanding of everyone at tea," he was saying in a harsh voice she had never heard before.

"Are you calling me a flirt?" Violet snapped back. She had picked a rose and was now pulling it to pieces.

"You were wrong to allow him to pay you so much attention, and you know it!"

"Now Clarissa is speaking through you!" Violet stamped her small foot, though only a twist of her wide skirt suggested the angry gesture.

Dilly's mouth shaped a big *O*. Violet was angrier than her little sister had seen her since Bruce had broken her perfume bottle last Christmas.

"We'll leave Clarissa out of this!" Chris returned. "She has only the best wishes for our happiness —"

"Does she?" Now Violet's face looked white, almost as though she were going to be sick. "I was warned about her. She isn't going to give up her brother willingly —"

"Shame, Violet — that is not just. Clarissa has been very kind and would be more loving if you let her. But she has nothing to do with your encouragement of Ridgley in such a public fashion —"

Violet was tugging at her wrist. The bracelet she wore there was caught in the lace of her sleeve.

"As well I learned in time, Colonel Hale, just what kind of suspicious tyrant you are! It is plain we don't suit and never will if you can take some harmless fun so seriously. I don't like your ordering me about, and I don't like you anymore, either! You can give this back to Clarissa as a trophy to prove her dear brother is free from the toils of the seductress!"

"Violet, you've gone beyond reason!" The outraged man's face was red, and his small mustache seemed to bristle.

"No, *you* have!" Violet tossed at her erstwhile lover the bracelet she had at last freed from the lace. The ornament fell to the ground just beyond the edge of her skirts. He made no move to retrieve it, as Violet, gathering up the same skirts a little, blundered away from the small clearing. Nor did she look back.

Chris stood very still. He looked, the

Artwork by George Barr

Artwork by George Barr

eavesdropping child thought, like Papa when something at the Manor had gone very wrong. Not stooping for the bracelet, he turned and marched in the opposite direction as stiffly as if he were on parade before the Queen herself.

Dilly waited until she could no longer hear any footsteps from either direction. Then she squeezed through the screen of foliage so that her hand could close upon the bracelet. Since Violet had thrown it away and Chris had not taken it up, then neither of them wanted it, and she had found it. She had never seen it really close, for Violet had only had it for a few days. Chris's sister, the one who had fallen from her horse and couldn't walk anymore, had sent it to Violet when the engagement had been known to their families.

Now Dilly turned the ornament around and around, admiring what seemed to her to be a true treasure. It was formed of gold links holding together ovals, every one a little picture set in a gold frame. And the designs were all of flowers made of small bits of white and green set into black, each forming a white violet.

The little girl closed her hand tightly upon the bracelet. No one wanted it; they had just left it lying there, so it was going to be hers. She had heard it had come all the way from Italy — Simpson had told the first housemaid that. Now she had a precious thing of her very own from far off! Pushing back under the bushes, she retrieved Rosamond and Lucy and, with them under her arm, she started back to the house, keeping hidden as best she could.

There was the sound of hooves on the circle drive, and Dilly saw Chris riding off.

Back up the second stairs to the schoolroom the child padded and hunted out her own secret place, which not even Mackie knew about. Dilly had discovered it herself one rainy day when she was tired of the doll family and the many-times-read books and had gone poking about, running her fingers along the carvings on the wall. There were a lot of these, because this was the oldest part of the Manor and the rooms here had once been important.

The child had pushed on a rose that day and been amazed when there had come in answer a creaking and the opening of a very small cupboard built right into the wall itself. Then, there had been nothing but dust inside, but Dilly had cleared that out and afterwards used the cubbyhole for secret treasures. There were the sixpence from the Christmas pudding and the little tarnished silver heart she had found back in a drawer, and now the bracelet joined them.

There was a great bustling in the house. Dilly dared to creep to Violet's room and, even through the thick door, she could hear her sister crying hard and Aunt Susan's voice sounding almost as sharp as Chris's had been.

Of course, no one ever told Dilly anything, but she listened as she always did, and Mackie was not around to keep her in the schoolroom. Papa came up the stairs — the child could hear the heavy stamp of his feet in spite of the hall carpet — and went into Violet's room. Then he roared, and Dilly heard all sorts of things about her sister's behaving badly, shaming the family, and being an unfilial daughter with no feelings for anyone but herself.

In the end, all the preparations for the ball stopped right in the middle, leaving the servants whispering in corners. Then Mackie had found Dilly eavesdropping, and she, too, had been told she was a disgrace for listening.

The family never really let her know what happened, but, three weeks later, Violet and Aunt Susan went away. Papa spent most of his time shut up in the library, while all the servants kept as much distance as possible from that room.

It was autumn before Violet came back. She looked quite different — more like a grown-up lady. She always spoke in a sharp way and mostly ignored her little sister, but she had a new ring, and Dilly was going to have a new brother — Lord Ridgley. The child did not like him very much, for he acted as though he did not see her, was stiff, and had hard eyes.

Dilly was allowed down for tea on the afternoon that the news came about Chris. Lord Ridgley had brought in a paper from London and read it out loud: Colonel Sir Christopher Hale had fallen in battle with the Sepoy rebels at Lucknow, way off in India. Lord Ridgley looked at Violet right after he read that. The child saw her sister's face go very pale and her hand shake so that her cup clattered on the saucer as

Artwork by George Barr

she set it quickly down, but her lips were very tight together, and she raised her eyes and looked back at Lord Ridgley, saying,

"He was doing his duty; that meant much to him." Dilly thought she heard a quaver in Violet's voice, though her sister did not move even a hand. But Aunt Susan began to cry and, catching sight of the child, sent her back to Mackie.

One season followed another. Dilly had a governess now, though Mackie still ruled her life. She was growing up, Rosamond and Lucy had been packed away, and she had lessons, not only from books but also in dancing, manners, and how to act in company.

Violet did not come home often. Lord Ridgley had a post in the government, and the couple lived in London where, Dilly was told, her sister entertained a great deal and was considered a fine hostess. No one ever mentioned Chris, and there was no visiting between the Manor and the Hall. Sometimes, though, Dilly saw Clarissa out riding in the carriage. The young woman looked away quickly on such occasions, for there was something in that gaunt, sharp-featured face which made her shiver, though she never knew why.

Dilly herself rode along the paths, but she kept away from those which were close to the Hall. Then she met Clement. For a moment, when she first saw him, she had been startled — he looked so much like Chris, only he was young. Clement was a soldier, too, but only a captain. He was also a "Sir," because Chris had died and he was Chris's brother's son. He had come to spend his leave at the Hall because his Aunt Clarissa wished it. Dilly heard Mackie and Miss Johnson, her governess, talking, and Mackie declaring that Miss Clarissa was "fair daft" about Clement, even as she had been about her brother.

"Never wanted to share that one." Mackie put down the petticoat she was hemming. "She tried to keep him away from Miss Violet, only he had a will of his own. But I have always thought" — she hesitated before she continued — "that she had a hand in breaking that engagement. Miss Violet — it was like she had been somehow witched. She stood out against all of us, saying she never wanted to see him again. It was a pity —" Mackie shook her head.

Though there was no visiting between the Manor and the Hall, the girl did meet Clement, and in the most proper way. She had ridden to the vicarage with some special herb receipts Mackie had promised Mrs. Trevor, and Clement was walking in the garden with Mr. Trevor, who came forward at once to greet her and introduce his visitor.

Dilly felt an odd breathless sensation when she looked into his grey eyes. Chris's eyes had been blue, but Clement still seemed so much like his uncle that she almost called him Chris. He was very polite and asked if he might accompany her when she left. She had John, the groom, with her, so it was indeed proper, and she had not the least desire to say no.

They met again and again in the weeks which followed. The young woman always had John with her, and she felt there was no harm in doing this. Somewhat to her surprise, Clement never mentioned the past, Violet, or Chris, and she wondered if he knew about what had happened more than a dozen years ago.

At length, greatly daring, she invited him to tea. When she admitted to Aunt Susan what she had done, her aunt looked shocked, and Dilly had to hurry on to explain that the couple had been properly introduced by the vicar.

"Captain Hale never speaks of Violet or Chris," she said quickly. "Perhaps he does not even know."

"He must." Aunt Susan sounded almost grim. "But, since you have been forward enough to ask him, he will be our guest. It is a pity that your father is in London — I do not like this situation in the least."

The tea, however, was pleasant; Clement was most attentive to Aunt Susan, and Dilly could see that he was winning at least her approval. Nor was that their last meeting at the Manor.

When Papa returned, Dilly was summoned to the library — a fearsome place in which explanations of behavior were always demanded and punishments announced. By now, though, the girl was so sure she *had* done right that her shivers as she entered were but slight ones.

"What's this your aunt tells me about young Hale?" Her father was plainly not at his most yielding. "I wonder that

Artwork by George Barr

one of his family comes near to this house!" He slammed his hand flat on the desk so hard that one of the pens jumped out of its holder.

"He — he never mentions Violet — or Chris." Dilly summoned her courage. "He has been most proper — Aunt Susan will tell you."

Papa just sat staring at her. "Hale's a good enough youngster," he said at last, "but why —" He stopped short.

"Papa —" The girl decided to risk all upon one throw. "The fête in the garden next week — may we send him an invitation?"

Again her father did not answer at once. "Well, that can do no harm, I suppose, though I think perhaps Miss Clarissa will arrange matters so that he does not come. She is a very bitter woman, Dilly. If you continue to see this young man, she may make trouble for you. She never wanted Chris to marry — they were twins, and she was fiercely jealous of Violet. I have always wondered ..." He shook his head as though trying to dismiss some unpleasant thought. "Just be careful, child. You're not as quick-spoken as your sister; see you keep on in that way and guard your tongue.

The fête was held, and even Papa unbent when Aunt Susan introduced Clement to him; nor did he ever give any more warnings during the long summer days when Dilly felt she was caught up in a dream. Then came the time when the Captain found her alone in the rose garden and asked if he might speak to her father about an engagement. That was the dream come true!

There would not be a ball this time — Aunt Susan said something about tempting Providence — but instead only a gathering of friends at dinner when the momentous announcement was to be made. To her aunt's obvious surprise, the invitation sent in courtesy to Miss Hale was actually answered in the affirmative.

On that afternoon, Dilly wandered into the old schoolroom. Though it was kept in general order by the housemaids, no one came here much anymore. The young woman opened the chest drawer and looked in at Rosamond and Lucy. The sight of them made her think of that long-ago day in the garden and, on impulse, she went to her hiding place.

There was the bracelet, gleaming never more beckoningly from the dark pocket. The girl drew the ornament out, put it on, and fastened the catch. It was pretty, too pretty to be hidden. Certainly no one would remember it after all these years, so — she would wear it this evening! That decision seemed to come out of nowhere almost like an order.

Dilly had a new dress of the palest green, and Sally, who now acted as her maid upon occasion, coaxed her red-brown hair into the most orderly waves, with a curl to lie across her shoulder. She then endured the twitching and turning of the modified-crinoline-supported skirt which was the latest fashion. And, for the first time in her life, she looked into the mirror and decided she *was* attractive — as attractive as Violet had been.

"Come along with you." Mackie stood just within the door. "The first of the carriages has turned in, and you must be ready to greet the guests."

This evening, Dilly appeared to have laid her usual slightly-timid and retiring manner away with her daytime dress. Her hand sought the bracelet, turning it around and around on her wrist as she descended the stairs. Young ladies mostly wore a modest pearl necklet like the one she also had on, but there was nothing worldly or showy about her other ornament.

Papa held out his hand to her as she took the last step down and, beyond him, smiling welcome, was — Clement. The young woman blinked and blinked again. These past two months, the Captain's face had become as well known to her as her own mirrored features; but his grey eyes now — they were somehow unpleasant, as though

Artwork by George Barr

she had committed a social error. And there was a quirk to his lips as he smiled which made him look almost disdainful and caused her to feel like a country girl intruding among her betters.

Then she was standing between her father and Clement with Aunt Susan in line, greeting neighbors and distant members of the family. Violet had sent a civil refusal — this was the night of an important dinner which Lord and Lady Ridgley were helping to host. Oddly, no one had thought her refusal strange.

Dilly's arm, wearing the bracelet, hung down beside Clement. Twice he had crooked his own arm in invitation, but for some reason she shrank with a real sense of aversion from his touch. She could not understand why her intended seemed suddenly such a stranger, and she tried to tell herself it was because she was uncomfortable at being the center of attention as she had never been before.

Most of the guests had arrived when there was a small commotion at the doorway, and an unusual procession appeared. First came a chair which was mounted on wheels and was being pushed by a brawny footman in full livery. There was no mistaking the sharp-featured face of the woman who sat bundled in several shawls in that strange conveyance. Dilly heard a startled "Hmph!" from Papa; then he and Aunt Susan moved forward to greet Miss Clarissa Hale, whose penetrating glance had already shaken Dilly. A moment later, the Captain took a grasp on her arm and pulled her forward too.

However, the woman in the wheeled chair had another attendant. Dilly, trying to forget that unpleasant stare pinning her, gave a little gasp.

The stranger presented a complete contrast to the dark figure huddled in wraps to whom he paid patient attention. He — he was the Knight! Dilly saw him as plainly as if he had stepped from the pages of the **IDYLLS OF THE KING** which the girl had dreamed over ever since Papa had given her the volume for her last birthday. Somehow she was able to take her eyes from him long enough to greet Miss Hale, whose stretch of thin lips was anything but a cordial smile.

"Since we are family, or about to become so," Miss Hale spoke directly to Aunt Susan now, "I knew that you would not mind an addition to the party. An extra young man is always useful." She laughed, and to Dilly that mirthless noise sounded exactly like a crow's harsh call. "This is Gerald Langley, dear Clement's cousin on his mother's side, who happened to be passing through the shire and had the good manners to renew family bonds with a visit."

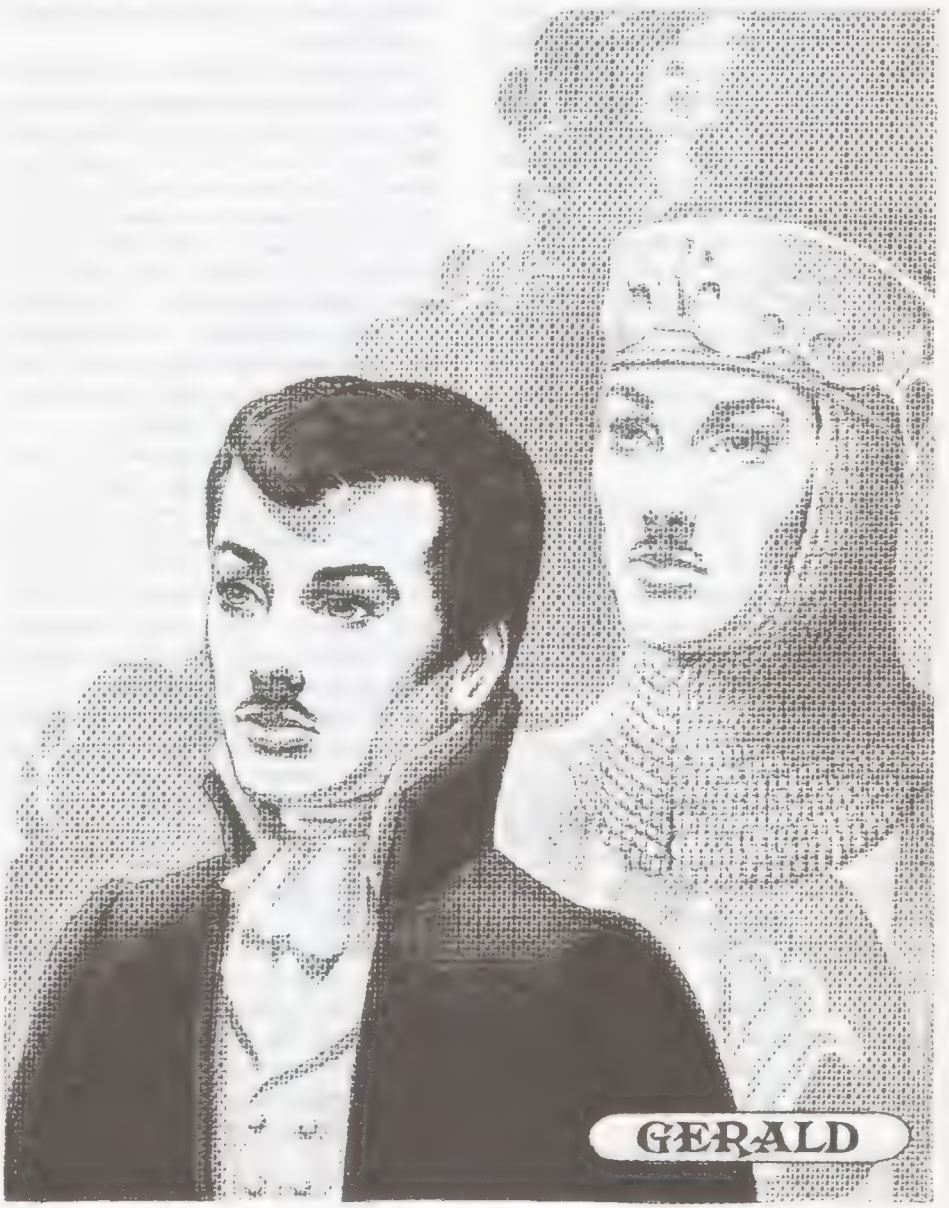
Both Aunt Susan and Papa had on their set "social faces," but the young woman was sure they were not pleased; only one could not turn the guest of a guest from the door.

At that moment, Hawkins came to announce that dinner was served. Aunt Susan looked around a little wildly, as if she wondered how they were to conjure up a place for this unexpected addition to the party, but Hawkins favored his mistress with a certain look which suggested that the matter was well in hand. Nothing ever seemed too difficult for that pillar of the family to manage.

"Foster, you may go now." Miss Hale was abruptly dismissing the footman who had pushed her in. "Sir Clement knows well how to manage for me."

And Clement did move obediently to the handle at the back of that chair. Dilly watched him, not a little nettled. By all the social laws, he should have taken *her* in himself, but it was plain that his aunt had him well "under her paw" — a saying Mackie often used.

"Miss Manners, may I have the pleasure?" It was the Knight, coming to her rescue before the eyes of the company, just as was fitting for the occasion. Dilly looked up at him. Yes, he was just like the Knight. Was it Lancelot or Galahad? She could not remember now; however, she felt a warm glow as she put



Artwork by George Barr

her hand lightly on the arm he offered. At least she would not be trailing behind Captain and Miss Hale like a charity child summoned in for inspection!

There was something of an undignified scramble at the table where Miss Hale's majestic chair had to be accommodated. The result was that that lady sat on the right hand of her host with Clement still in close attendance on her left. As the minutes passed, Dilly's irritation grew. Her intended seemed altogether occupied with seeing to his aunt's comfort, answering various questions she addressed to him between statements to Papa concerning affairs in the world at large. She would say such things as, "Now, you are a military man, dear Clement — what is the Army's reaction to this?"

Dilly found that, in a curious way, he seemed to be fading — that he was not her bright and happy friend or, yes, lover anymore. She had a growing feeling of shadows stretching out to overcast the future drawing near. Would Clement expect her, after they were married, to *live* with Miss Hale? The estate belonged to him, but he constantly deferred to his aunt, saying that she had run it ably for so long her advice was needed.

For contrast, she allowed herself to be amused by the light chatter of her seatmate, Mr. Langley, who seemed to be anything but "under Miss Hale's paw." The girl found herself laughing at his amusing comments about his travels in the shires.

Suddenly the older woman shot a question at her, completely interrupting a story Mr. Langley was telling. "It is somewhat unusual for a young lady to wear much jewelry, but that is a very handsome bracelet you are displaying this evening — certainly fine mosaic work. Italian, is it not?"

Dilly flushed. She knew Clarissa had recognized the bracelet. What would that sour spinster say next? Clement was frowning at his intended as though she had, indeed, broken some rule of good breeding. Defiantly, she held her hand out a little further so that the candlelight brought the ornament in question fully into view.

"It is an old piece, Miss Hale. I really do not know much about it, except that I found it in a drawer. The pattern is quite pretty, and I admit it tempted me."

Miss Hale was smiling once more. "Just so. Violets are modest, maidenly flowers and quite suitable. Clement, I think my chair needs some adjustment —?"

There had been something about that exchange which made the younger woman feel a small shiver. She wanted to pull the bracelet off as Violet had done in the rose garden on that day a dozen years ago, but she could not make a scene. Now, though, the mosaic piece seemed very cold, and the flowers looked faded and far from pretty. She turned abruptly to Mr. Langley with the first remark that crossed her mind — something about the rose garden. Rose garden — she must not think of that!

Fortunately, in moments her interest was caught and firmly held by his description of his visit to the royal gardens at Windsor and his subsequent presentation to His Highness the Prince of Wales. Clement and Miss Hale could be forgotten — Dilly was determined it would be so.

Only at last the dinner, which felt as though it had lasted forever, was nearing its end, when Papa would be giving the toast in honor of the engagement. How, at that moment, she longed for the Knight beside her to see her safely away! It seemed to Dilly that tonight Clement had revealed himself as an entirely different person — one she did not know and would not like even if she did. Deep within her arose a little quirk of wonder at why she felt that way, but it quickly vanished.

Somehow Dilly managed to sit and smile through the toast, blush in an appropriately-demure way, and accept the good wishes of the company without catching Clement's full gaze again. Mr. Langley was all consideration and once actually murmured something about time making him a loser which she hoped only she had heard.

Then the girl was free. By now, her head was pounding, and she wanted nothing more than her bed and Mackie's soothing hands stroking her hair. She glanced about in near desperation but knew that neither Aunt Susan nor Papa would countenance her withdrawal — no, she had to go inside, stand by her betrothed (who seemed bound by an invisible tether to his aunt's chair), and present the proper appearance. Mr. Langley still watched her, and now and then their eyes met. It almost seemed then that he understood her growing confusion and need for escape.

Finally the party began to break up. Clement turned to her with a suggestion that they go out onto the terrace, but Miss Hale's harsh demand that he guide her chair into the hall summoned him away. Aunt Susan and Papa were busy saying farewells when the Knight appeared beside her.

Dilly was not aware that she had raised the hand backed by the bracelet, but she found it clasped in his and felt the unnerving brush of his mustache as he raised her fingers a little to kiss them. At the same moment, Clement appeared in the doorway. His face looked hard and set, and he summoned Mr. Langley with a wave; nor did he come to Dilly but left with his aunt and cousin without so much as a goodnight.

The young woman's head was bursting now, and she wanted to cry. She got by Aunt Susan and Papa, she never knew how, and back to her room. Once in that merciful refuge, she sent Sally away and dropped into the big chair by the window, not caring how her skirts were being crumpled. Holding her head between her two hands, she tried to understand what had happened to her.

"Childie —" The familiar endearment from Mackie brought the tears, hurting tears, which Dilly tried to wipe away.

"I knew that one would make trouble." Mackie drew her close in soft, comforting arms; then, suddenly, the nurse's fingers closed tightly about her wrist and turned it into the light. The girl heard, even through her sobs, the hiss of the old woman's breath.

"Where did you get this?" Mackie gave a jerk hard enough to bruise Dilly's wrist and waved the bracelet before her charge's tear-filled eyes.

"I — I found it —"

"This was Miss Violet's, sent her by that woman."

Dilly managed to get out the story of that long-ago afternoon in the rose garden and what she had seen there. "The bracelet was so pretty, and they did not want it, so I took it." Her voice sounded childish even to herself.

"Pretty? Aye — about as pretty as a viper!" The aged nurse was holding the now-dangling band as she might well hold the reptile in question. Now, moving away from Dilly, she lifted the ornament close to the nearest candle. She was looking, not at the flowers, but rather at the back of the oval gold pieces which framed them.

"Yes — as I thought all along when Miss Violet acted so. This is a wicked, bewitched thing! That woman — she

knows more than anyone mortal has a right to do. I wonder she can set foot in church of a Sunday!

"But where there is darkness, there can be light. Where is your prayer-book, childie?"

Completely amazed to the point where she was no longer crying, Dilly went to the bedside table and took from its drawer the worn, velvet-bound book which had belonged to her mother and which she had carried to church more Sundays than she could remember.

Mackie had pulled aside the curtains at the closest window. Now she carefully placed the book, opened to a certain page she had hunted for in the full moonlight, and across the flattened volume she laid the bracelet.

"Darkness and hate, spite and harm — what is within this thing of evil, may it be brought forth. In the Names of the Father Above, the Son Whom we cherish, and the Holy Spirit Which awaits the call of any in need." She said the words slowly and solemnly, and then she added certain other ones which Dilly did not understand at all but which had the sound of an urgent summons.

Did she see a mist gather over the bracelet? The girl was always sure afterwards that she had. Then that mist passed on out through the window and was gone, and she felt as she had when she was small and was recovering from a bad illness. Now all the events of the night appeared utterly strange and unreal. Clement — Clement was strength, and warmth, and loving —

The young woman rubbed her hand across her eyes. "Mackie — do such things happen? This is real life, no fairy tale! Did Miss Hale wish some kind of bad thing on Violet and Chris and try to do it again with me, until you sent it away?"

"Childie, there are many powers in the world, both good and evil. Belief makes either one strong to help or hinder. This evil is gone —"

"But I do not want that ever again." Dilly looked at the bracelet. "Put it away, Mackie, in one of the trunks in the attic. Let it stay hidden forever."

Clipping from the Obituary column of the Lincolnshire *Times*:

The sudden demise of Miss Clarissa Hale was a sharp and sad surprise for her family and friends. She bore her infirmities with dignity and courage and was an outstanding example of the best of a fine old family.

From the same publication six months later:

The wedding of Delia Lucinda Manners, daughter of the Right Honorable Robert Manners and his deceased wife, Lady Pauline Dervant Manners, was celebrated in St. Richard's, the bride's parish church. The happy couple are about to set sail for India, where Captain Sir Clement Hale will join his regiment, the Bengal Lancers. The Hale family have a long history of service to the Crown in that country.

Among the guests were -

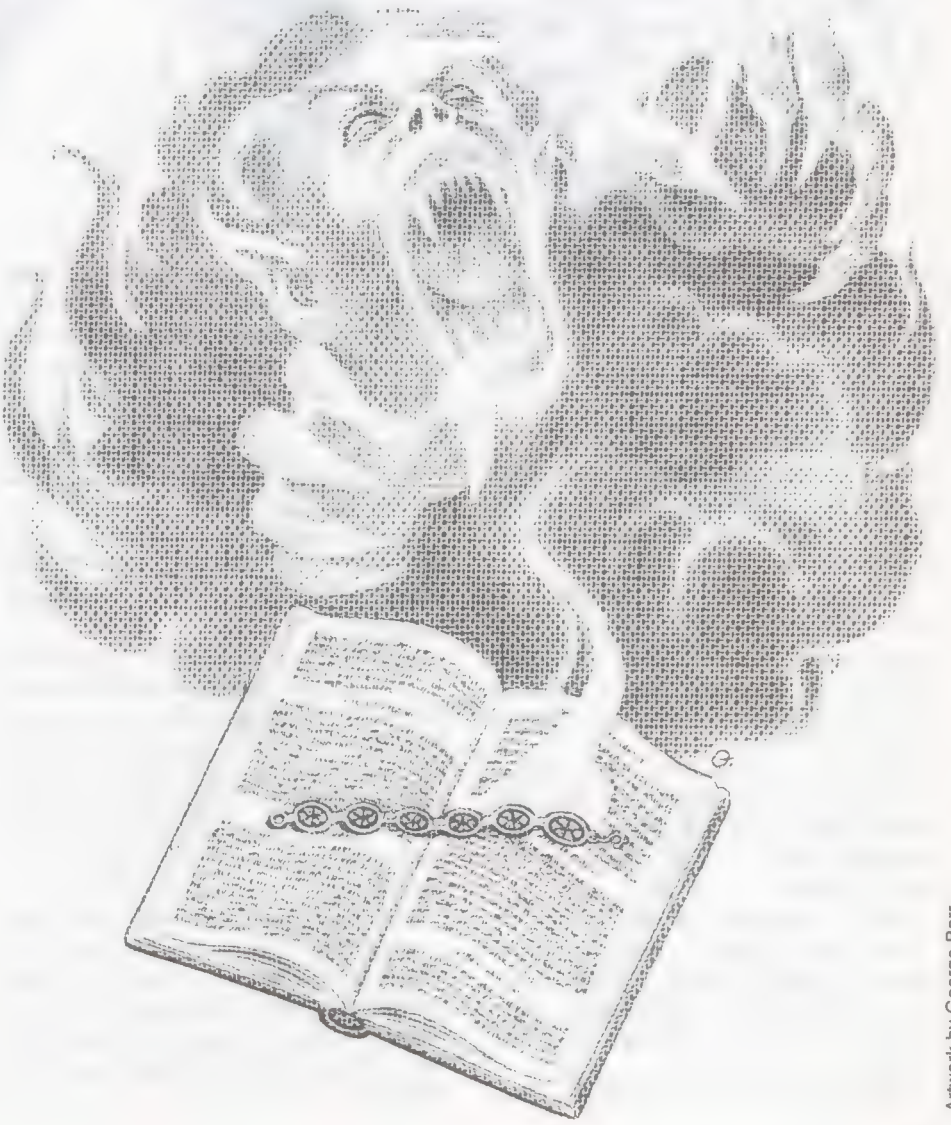
Advertisement in *Antique Guide 1995*:

Estate sale. Unusually fine example of 1840 Italian marble mosaic bracelet. Unique pattern of White Violets.

❄

Andre Norton's career has been so extensive she hardly needs an introduction. The biography her agent provided lists over a hundred novels, six anthologies, and numerous works in collaboration with other writers. Her books have been translated into Arabic, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Israeli, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, and Swedish, and she has received awards from the Invisible Little Man (awarded for fan activity) to the Gandalf, an international fantasy award; she is a Nebula Grand Master and holds both the Grey Mouser and the Skylark Awards.

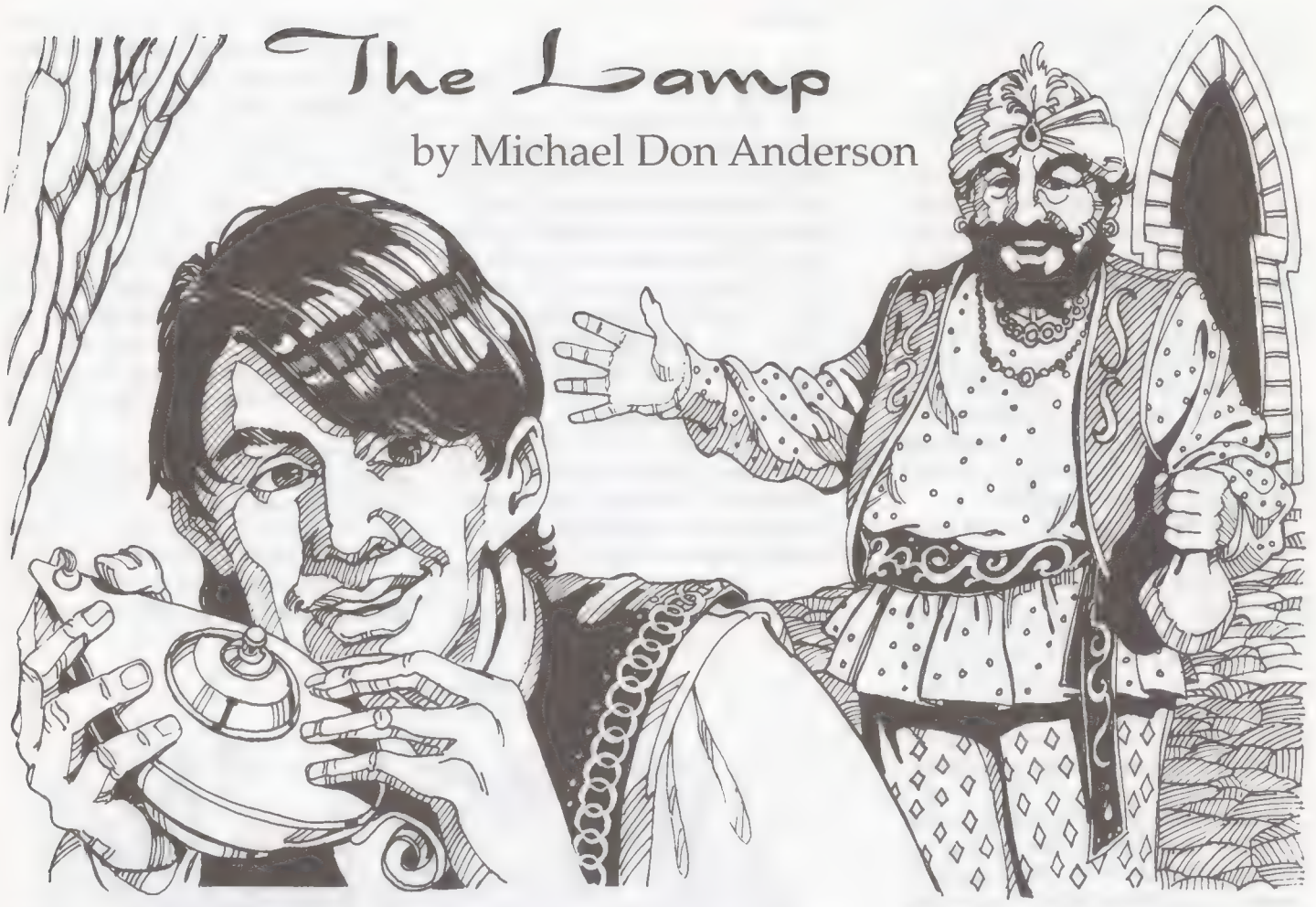
George Barr has been a professional artist since 1960. He lives near San Jose, California, and has received a Hugo as Best Fan Artist and has been the Artist Guest of Honor at Worldcon. He has illustrated numerous stories for this magazine, including some covers.



Artwork by George Barr

The Lamp

by Michael Don Anderson



Hamadrasha sat crouching on the branch until the plump bearded man was almost beneath him. He then slipped his bare feet off the tree limb and hurled himself down in front of the merchant.

His feet hit the ground with a practiced slap, and Hamadrasha immediately threw his hands in the air, clasping the small copper lamp he held tightly throughout.

"Oh, where have you sent me, you terrible lamp you! What kind of betrayal is this?!" He pulled the lamp close to his face, and with wide dark eyes, peered from it to the man's round contours. "Him?"

The eyes above the beard were startled, slightly glazed from wine. As Hamadrasha had planned, the man believed the boy appeared from the very air itself.

"Me?" responded the merchant. He looked about quickly, as if guilty of some trespass he knew nothing of. It was his first time in Baghdad in some three years, and laws changed with the wind.

"Forgive me, oh venerable sir. This magic lamp upon granting my three wishes demanded I take the lamp to he who was most worthy to next receive its boons. Alas, I did not realize the lamp would whisk me away from my home in Harush, across the sands to this place." Hamadrasha bowed carefully, a sad smile across his face as he beheld the lamp with tender eyes.

"Magic lamp?" echoed the drunk merchant, trying to focus his slightly blurry eyes on the treasure. "Is it really magic?"

"Why, sir! Did it not deliver me here, from the place I stood across the desert? Did I not just materialize before you? Had the lamp been any less careful I might have appeared within you, sir, and that could have been both our ends. Then some undeserving fool would find this lamp, and receive the next powerful wishes."

The merchant reached out thick hands to take the lamp, but Hamadrasha raised it over his head and began loudly talking to the lamp again. "Lamp, I cannot give you to this man, as you desire, because I am now trapped far from home. The cost to travel that far is beyond my meager funds. I was preparing to dress when you used your magic to bring me here!" The boy was carefully clean and his hair oiled to shine like a king's. He began to moan, cursing the lamp and its powerful magic.

"Boy, if that lamp chooses to be mine, you must give it to me. I will wish you home after it is mine," demanded the merchant, now hooked by the boy's attempt to keep the lamp from him. In this city, there were supposed to be magical lamps abounding. Surely he *was* worthy, and this lamp had sought *him* out.

"I cannot! No wish that will benefit me will work, for I have had my three wishes. I am now wealthy beyond words, but my wealth is across the sands. I have a beautiful bride, but she knows nothing of my fate. And the third wish has made my wife and any other maiden I choose very very satisfied." Hamadrasha covered the snicker that fought its way to his face. Indeed, a quick discreet glance from the merchant revealed a very large dowry within the boy's baggy pants.

Artwork by James Balkovek

"I must have the lamp," demanded the merchant again, more eager to possess it than the moment before.

"And sir, I must find my way home. I am a rich man, and cannot sell my body for camel fare home!"

"Of course, of course. Forgive me, sahib. I was thoughtless. I have of course just a small amount of money on me that I might part with, so that you might return home. I will simply wish for three times that wealth, and it will be easily replaced."

Hamadrasha laughed openly then. "Of course, how stupid I am! What a simple solution. Thank you! I am indebted that not only have you come up with a solution to my dilemma, but that you had an answer for my stupidity. You are a clever man, no wonder the lamp desires you to own it!"

"Will a thousand dracmars suffice?" hedged the merchant, aware that the boy would have to sell himself often to make up the difference between that amount and his travel costs.

"But sir, surely one so wise as you knows that travel to my homeland would cost indeed twenty times that. I fear I must sell the lamp to someone less deserving, but more ready to part with their wealth. The more I am given, the easier to increase that money by three times! Twenty times! A thousand times! I of course was foolish there, I only wished for a thousand times the money my father had. Had I been wiser, I would have wished that many times the money the sultan has, and indeed would I be wealthy."

"You are correct. Here lad, take the entire purse. It is enough to make you home in comfort."

"Thank you, generous sir. I shall only take this because I know the lamp will reward you as you deserve, and this will be as nothing to you!" With wry humor, Hamadrasha took the purse and affixed it to his waist. He carefully handed over the lamp and cautioned the merchant.

"But remember. You must rub the lamp only when you are alone. The genie will not appear to others, and hence, I must be out of your sight before he will come. I bid you good life."

"And you, lad. Good life." The merchant clung to the lamp and looked around for others who might seek his prize. "Go, then, hurry! I wish to be wealthy before the hour is gone!" And with that, he turned his back on Hamadrasha and hurried around the corner. Hamadrasha grinned ear to ear and raced the other direction.

After several blocks, Hamadrasha slipped in the window of a small tent. Within it were lamps of various shapes and sizes, all of them copper, battered or obviously repaired. A pile of rags shook, and the grey spiked hair of a weary woman revealed puffy eyes that looked up from the table she huddled over.

"So clean, Hamadrasha? And what have you lost in your pants, boy!?" She chuckled as Hamadrasha reached into his pants and removed a huge sausage which was tied about his waist.

"Dinner, Grandmother! Unless you would rather consider its other uses?" chuckled the boy audaciously. The woman cackled too, and bent over the lamp she was currently repairing.

"I sold another lamp, Grandmother." Hamadrasha opened the purse and threw her the value of three lamps. "Less my commission of course."

"Hamadrasha. This is the third lamp this week you have sold, and for so much money? How? Do you steal the money? Will they come soon and remove *your* sausage for cutting purses? I've grown fond of you, lad." There was a worried sparkle in her eyes, and she turned from him to fret over the lamp again.

"No, Grandmother. I have sold lamps, not cut purses. I have just been fortunate to find such generous people. I have learned well from you how to

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sell what can be sold."

"Well, *this* is something we cannot sell!" From the table she crowded over, the tired woman held up in her thin, strong hands a small silver lamp. It was the most beautiful lamp Hamadrasha had ever seen. "It is here for repairs. I was not offered it as a sales item, nor could I afford it or its like. I am offered the price of ten lamps to repair this one to newness."

"It is fit for the home of a genie!" crooned Hamadrasha. He glanced at the woman, but she simply smiled through her shining eyes.

"Yes, Hamadrasha. It is indeed a fabulous lamp. Not truly expensive, mind you. It is a crude silver, and working it is very difficult. But the craftsmanship. Yes, it is truly a masterpiece."

Hamadrasha sprawled into the stack of pillows which served as his bed, jingling the weight of coins in his purse. It was a happy, hefty sound which made him dream of fine clothes, veiled nubile young women, and a sultan's palace as he fell asleep.

"Hamadrasha. Hamadrasha!" Gentle but strong hands shook his wiry frame awake.

"Not again, Farima. You are insatiable," murmured the sleeping boy while his eyes fluttered open.

The unkempt woman he called Grandmother loomed over him. "Up! Up! The lamp is ready. You've slept through almost the rest of the day. I need you to take this to the man staying with Balthula. He's to pay you the value of ten lamps or you don't give it to him, understand?"

"How will I know him, Old Woman?" asked Hamadrasha with an expansive yawn.

"He's as old as I look, and as tall as two of you, and just as thin. Rich looking, but miserly if I'm a judge of men."

"Some day, Old Woman, when you are rich from lamp repairing, I will marry you. And you will remember how well I served you." The woman swatted his back and Hamadrasha danced about. "No, no. None of that until we are wed!" And laughing, the boy grabbed the lamp and jumped out the tent.

He raced along the well-known path that led to both marketplace and the luxurious tent of Balthula. He was watchful, lest the fat merchant from the morning be wandering about in search of his purse. Halfway to the tent of Balthula, he paused, sliding behind a tree.

It was no fat, cheated merchant who walked slowly along the shops which were scattered everywhere along the way to Balthula. Rather, a regal and powerful-looking young man strode proudly along. He wore a gem about his neck that the thrifty and streetwise Hamadrasha believed could purchase a sultan's harem.

Of course, it could be polished glass, thought the boy, flipping the black hair out of his face with the silver lamp's trunk. The silver polished from Grandmother's work caught the light as did the noble's gem. Hamadrasha then noted the glittering silver sword hilt and the vibrant sheen of the noble's silk about his waist.

The silver lamp was worthy of a genie's home. Surely even a nobleman of such youth would agree to that. It was the most dangerous thought young Hamadrasha had ever given birth to, but the gem flashed through his caution to speak directly to his greed.

Hamadrasha looked at the lamp in his hands, and then at the wealthy man who browsed closer and closer. The old woman would be punished, however, if the lamp disappeared. They would most likely remove her hands. But if he had that gemstone... it would allow Hamadrasha to take the old woman away forever. He shook out of his head the picture of the old woman's hands cut off and nailed to the table where she worked. No, he could do it! And only a beautifully old lamp such as this would win its way past that dangerous and wealthy victim.

Yes! he decided. The impish grin sparkling in his eyes, his lithe body vibrant with energy as he leapt into the lower branches of the tree under which he stood. Hamadrasha noted that the last tent on this street was not far from his current hiding place; he feared it was not close enough to repeat his morning's performance.

Hurriedly he looked around the street, seeing nothing that would allow him to drop in front of the noble to begin his well-practiced sham. *Perhaps...* But the boy's thought dissolved as the noble walked directly to the tree to find shade. *What remarkable fortune! Praise Kadesh!* thanked the boy, and prepared a crouch that would aim a landing almost atop the noble, but far enough from the tree that Hamadrasha hoped the noble would not suspect trickery.

Closer. Closer. He leapt and straightened into a hard slapping stance before the wealthy young man.

"What, ho!? Lamp! Where have you cast me?" wailed the confused Hamadrasha. "This cannot be Gwalior, my beloved home." Hamadrasha suddenly took startled notice of the young man staring at him with shrewd but intrigued eyes.

"Forgive me sir." The boy knelt before the man's obvious wealth. "This magic lamp has a will of its own, and I had no choosing in my arrival."

"Magic?" asked the noble, a curious smile playing across his lips. "You know this lamp is magical?"

Hamadrasha did not notice the unusual flavor of the question's wording as he began his performance with zeal. But he remembered he was playing a different target now, and must choose his lures carefully. A wealthy man might not be tempted as much by greater wealth but by that which it will not purchase.

"Yes, oh noble one. Magic indeed! Unlike you, who came by his wealth by ordinary means, mine came from one blessed wish from this accursed lamp!"

"My first wish, dubious as I was, was only for twice the sultan's wealth within my tent. It made me wealthy beyond my hopes, though I had to climb a mountain of coins to come and go.

"My second wish was for a princess bride. Not just any princess, but she who was as beautiful as the stars, as fiery as the desert, and as soft as silk. And indeed, we are to be wed upon my return home from this unexpected journey.

"My third wish," Hamadrasha remembered a shy grin, "was for that which would not only satisfy my bride-to-be, but all of her handmaidens as well."

The noble did not even glance down at Hamadrasha's reference, but rather raised an eyebrow with intense curiosity. He started to speak, but Hamadrasha feared the question and continued, suddenly aware that he had not remembered to stuff his pants this time as proof of the wish.

"But the lamp, oh, in its determined way, after my last wish told me that I must take it to he who is worthy of its great power next. I can only believe that it means you, oh noble sir!" He bowed with a flourish that the noble returned.

"Alas," added the boy ruefully, "I

was also bade by my bride-to-be to find a worthy gift before the sun set to give her lest she find disfavor for me. Now it will take me that much time to return home. And I shall lose my beloved princess." Hamadrasha managed tears.

"My dear boy. You seem so distraught, why? Such a powerful lamp, can you not wish for a beautiful gem to give her?"

"Alas no! My three wishes are gone and only the next owner shall be gifted with three wishes more.

"If only I had such a gem as that about your neck. Such a wondrous treasure surely would satisfy the most impossible of women." Hamadrasha stared in genuine wonder at the tiny pinpoints of light which darted across the gem's surface.

"Then if I am to have this wondrous lamp," the baritone young noble replied with a smile, "you may have the gem about my neck in its place. I can, can I not, wish for ten of its kind?"

"Why, yes, of course. How stupid of me not to think of that. A perfect solution! Oh, thank you, sahib!"

"Here, you must remove it from my neck, as I cannot manage the clasp alone. And place it about your neck for safekeeping," advised the noble as Hamadrasha removed the gem and its chain. The boy obeyed gladly.

"It will look beautiful on she who is to be my bride!"

"But one moment, boy." Hamadrasha's heart froze for a second, his success turning to decapitation in his mind. "How do I know that this lamp is magical? That it will do all that you say it will?"

With recovered fortitude the boy responded confidently. "You surely saw me appear nearly within your very cloak by its great power. What more proof do you need?"

"True." The noble rubbed his beardless jaw, while studying the boy's face. "But will you swear on your honor, by the lamp, that there is a genie within that lamp?"

"I will do better!" cried Hamadrasha in his victory. Such ease of success made him confident, and expansive. "I, Hamadrasha, swear by the power of this lamp, that if there is no genie within, then may I be imprisoned a thousand years instead within it."

The noble smiled, a certain, arrogant smile that reflected cruelly in his eyes. As Hamadrasha's voice fell silent, as his oath rang along the empty street, the lamp within his hands began to warm.

Tendrils of smoke spurt forth from the silver spout, like clawing tentacles they wrapped around Hamadrasha, caressing him, gripping his body.

"The genie! Oh no, I have invoked a true genie! I will gain three true wishes!" cried the joyfully startled boy. "I wish..." he began without hesitation, but a tendril of smoke darted down his throat, another split and filled his

nostrils. Other tendrils entered his ears, and the lower crevices of his young body.

"I'm afraid you misunderstand, *sahib*," said the noble with genuine dark humor. "You see, there is no genie within this magic lamp." He took the lamp from the boy who was too astonished to move. "But there will be for another thousand years."

"What?" choked out the boy, the smoke still filling his body, his lungs, making him light-headed.

"While my master had my lamp repaired, he gave me the freedom of the city. By wearing the gem of binding voluntarily, and swearing by the power of the lamp, you have gained the power of a genie, as well as binding to the lamp for a thousand years."

"If I have the power of the lamp," struggled Hamadrasha, ringing beginning to sound in his head, "then I command the lamp to return you to it!"

"Alas!" wailed the noble in mock imitation of Hamadrasha. "Only one who voluntarily takes the gem from about your neck, wears it and swears by the lamp can be bound within. And even then, you must wait a thousand years to be free, by your own command. And a genie's own magic cannot be undone."

Hamadrasha began to waver as his body filled with smoke and began to become discorporate, pulled into the spout by invisible magical currents, his particles beginning to separate and fly into the lamp.

"I served a lonely fifty years, but my current master is kind. He will take well to you, having been bored with me of late. And I...? I shall take care of your princess while you are gone!"

Hamadrasha wailed a silent cry, his body become dust within the lamp and his voice the whisper of a leaf falling.

The woman called Grandmother paced back and forth in her tent, shooting furtive glances at the window with each flutter of the wind. She felt something must be wrong, it was late, and the boy had not returned. She wrung her hands anxiously and pouted.

Hamadrasha had been faithful to her before, but perhaps his insolence had cost her her fee — or worse, had cost her the hyper boy's life. She had never told him her secret, and with this sale, she had chosen to reveal her true nature to him. He was not so greedy that he neglected her welfare. So now she trusted him enough to repay him.

She had washed and oiled her hair, the first time in months. It had been so veiled with dust that it had looked grey — it now shone like black velvet. Her sun-abused face she greased and painted, and her true age was far younger than any had known. And instead of the baggy draping rags, she now wore a silk robe that showed her nubile figure well.

"Oh, Hamadrasha. Please have had sense this day!" Her voice, unmasked, was a golden bell joyfully free.

Someone slipped through the window and she gasped in startlement.

"Greetings, oh beautiful one."

Grandmother grabbed a hammer and held it between herself and the stranger. "Get away, or I shall harm you!" But the stranger was very handsome, and

Artwork by James Balkovek

carried himself too well to be a common rapist.

"I bear tidings of one Hamadrasha." At the boy's name, she lowered the hammer and looked relieved.

"Is he all right then? Where is he?" she began, suddenly aware of how the man looked at her.

"I am afraid, oh beautiful one, that you have seen the last of Hamadrasha. He sent me to tell you that he is grateful for all you have done. But he met a beautiful slave at the tent of Balthula, and stole away with her." The man watched as Grandmother's eyes began to tear, and her strong but small hands covered her beautiful and sad face.

"But there is one thing more. He sent me to you, and bade me take care of his princess. I give you this, as a dowry." He flung a heavy purse at the young woman, whose hands slipped away from her face as curiosity drove away her sadness.

She picked up the purse, and spilled the contents onto her work table. The lamplight dazzled from the flawless gems which bounced across the wood, a sultan's ransom!

"I am humble, oh beautiful one. And this is all my wealth, that I have given to you. Will you accept me?" He smiled, and lowered his eyes to the ground.

Grandmother looked at the fine muscles in his arms, the beautiful way he stood, and the fine silver design in the hilt of his sword. And she felt little doubt that Hamadrasha had left her for some young beauty. He was a trickster that one, and most likely would wind up dead before he was twenty. But this one...!

"And if I accept, what will you give me?" she asked with a confident smile on her face.

"Why, three wishes, of course, my beloved. Three wishes." And the gems were muted by his dazzling smile.

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MICHAEL DON ANDERSON writes: "I am a 35-year-old single man born and raised in the Reedley area of California. This will be my first short story published outside of a school newspaper. I am an anthropology student at California State University, Fresno, but have been working as a paralegal for over ten years.

"I am also a linguistics student by nature, and travel to two or three countries a year for language study under the guise of pleasure. Growing up, Edgar Rice Burroughs's **TARZAN** challenged me in that if he could learn multiple languages, I certainly could too.

"One of my passions has always been Arabian horses, which I own and ride. I am also partial to Werewolves, and am preparing a Werewolf Musical play for production locally with hopes of achieving the kinds of success other 'horror' musicals have achieved.

"And a bio of me would be incomplete if it didn't state that after reading Andre Norton's **UNCHARTED STARS** at age eight, I decided to be an author right then and there, and I've never stopped reading or writing since."

JAMES BALKOVEK is a native Californian and a graduate of California College of Arts and Crafts. An illustrator of numerous childrens' and educational books, he has over twenty years of illustration and design experience in commercial and editorial illustration.

EDITED BY DEBBIE NOTKIN AND THE SECRET FEMINIST CABAL

Flying Cups and Saucers:
Gender Explorations in Science Fiction & Fantasy

EVER WONDER WHAT HAPPENED to the rest of the tea party when the saucers went off into space? Here's your chance to find out!

The James Tiptree, Jr. Award has been recognizing science fiction and fantasy novels and stories that explore and expand gender for the past six years. Although the award itself is given to one or two works of fiction a year, each jury also produces a "short list" of notable works that were considered for the award.

This first anthology contains almost all of the short fiction that has either won or been short-listed in the first five years of the award. Contributors include Ursula K. Le Guin ("The Matter of Seggri" and "Forgiveness Day"), Eleanor Arnason, L. Timmel Duchamp, Carol Emshwiller, Kelley Eskridge, Graham Joyce and Peter F. Hamilton, R. Garcia y Robertson, Delia Sherman, and more.

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Edgewood Press
PO Box 380264
Cambridge, MA 02238
email orders: booksales@sf3.org

One cold winter day in the morning of the world, a knight named Karl rode into a city. He had been a captain in the wars, but for many years now he had been wandering the world seeing what he could see. He had wandered far from his home and this land of Rus was one of the fairest he had seen, though it was a difficult land to get to know. He did not know the name of the city he was entering, though from the evidence of new building he thought that one of its names was probably Novogorad — the New City. There were many places with that as part of their name, for the people of Rus were prospering and expanding, building new cities where none had been before.

He was not sure of his welcome though by and large he had been treated well in Rus. A lone man in armor is not always welcome in peaceful cities like this one seemed to be. So he was not surprised when the city guards told him to halt and give an account of himself. But the first question surprised him: "Are you a Bogotyr?" He thought a little and said,

"Sirs, in your language a Bogotyr means a knight of God. I have taken the knight's oath and I try to serve God, as best I can. But the word also means 'hero,' and I do not claim to be a hero."

The next question surprised him even more: "Have you had to do with a dragon who died?" they asked. He replied without hesitation,

"Sirs, that is curiously phrased. I do not claim to be a dragon slayer, and yet I did have dealings with a dragon, and the dragon died, though not by any action of mine. So in a very curious way I can answer 'yes' to that question."

Their third question left him completely astonished: "Do you bear a feather of the Bird of Fire?" He replied steadily,

"Sirs, I bear on my breast a wonderful feather which I brought away from that same encounter with the dragon. That it is from a Bird of Fire, I cannot say, but if any feather be worthy of such a bird, it is the feather I bear. And yet I would swear that no man, neither living nor dead, would know what I took from the dragon's cave."

Then the captain of the guards said, "Sir, by your answers I am strictly bound to bear you to our Tsaretsa. But

The Firebird's Feather, The King Horse, and Baba Yaga's Grandniece

by Richard Purtill

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

by my oath I may not admit any armed man to her presence. Will you render to me your sword and spear, so that I may keep both my oaths?" Karl looked at him and thought that he was an honest man — if you could not trust this man, whom could you trust? and he answered him:

"Sir, many men have tried to get my sword and spear from me, and none have succeeded. But at your request I will give you my sword and spear, and my shield also, for without sword and spear what good is a shield? Because I want you to take me to your Tsaretsa, so that I may resolve this riddle: how come that your questions answer so curiously to my state?"

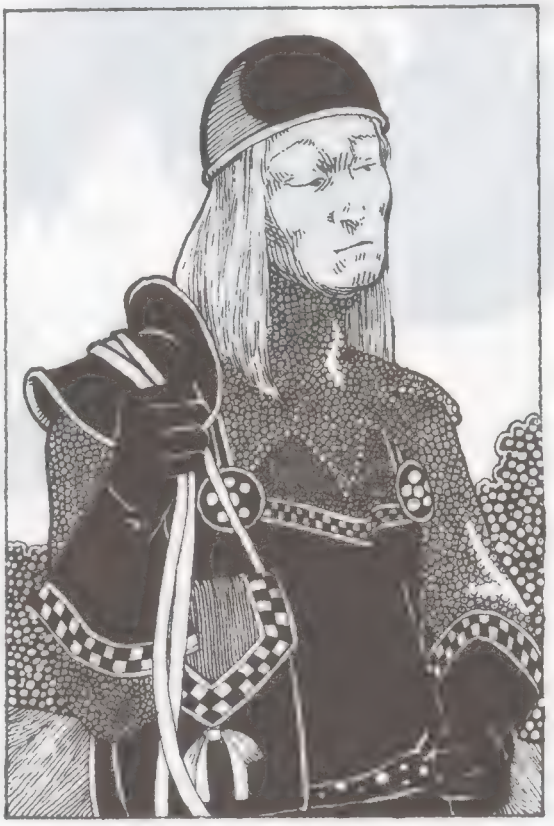
They led him through the city, and it was a good city, not so much beautiful as filled with strength and enthusiasm, so that even the buildings, half- or hastily constructed, gave a feeling of gladness. They led him up to the high house at the summit of the town, and here he saw men of knightly bearing and women who looked intelligent as well as beautiful. Karl thought that this was a goodly town and a goodly court and a man could do worse than end his days here.

Then they led him into the Tsaretsa, and he thought no more of the town or the court or of ending his days in peacefulness. She was beautiful, he supposed, though in some ways less beautiful than some of the ladies in her court. Her face in repose was sad, and only when she turned to some of the people around her and talked and laughed with them did she appear more beautiful than any of the other ladies. Then she was the center of attention, and every man in the room was aware of her. Yet when she sat quietly, her face looking as if she were thinking on some sorrow, she almost seemed to disappear among the crowded court.

But it was then that Karl liked most to look at her; he felt that in this mood she was more truly herself than when she was charming the court. He had a while to look at her because there were other visitors to greet, and a message about him had to be passed from one person to the other until it reached the circle around her.

So he stood and watched her, very content to do so. He felt as if he would never want to go out of sight of her, and yet at the same time that he would like to go out and do great deeds for her and come back and lay them at her feet. More than anything, he wanted to take that look of sadness from her face by removing whatever sorrow troubled her. To do that, he felt, would be worth dying for.

Finally a message was passed from the guards who had brought him in, to one of the men who surrounded the Tsaretsa: an old man with a lively, intelligent air. The man bent over to speak



to the queen. She nodded and the old man gave a sign to the guards to bring Karl forward. He stood before the Tsaretsa, and felt that this was where he belonged. Wherever he went from this time forward, it would be at her will and in her service.

"Lord Bogotyr," said the Tsaretsa, "you have answered the questions which one of the wise told me to put to any who came to our town in arms and armor, and you have answered them in a way which gives me some hope that you are the one he foretold. I do not doubt your word, but would you show me the feather which you were asked about?"

Karl reached into his chest armor and took the little box he had taken from the Dragon's cave. He handed it to her and she opened the box and looked within. He could see, and wondered if others saw, the light which flooded out of the box when she opened it, bringing out the red glints in her dark hair,

She closed the box and handed it back to him. "Thank you, my lord, for showing it to me. It gives me even greater hope that you are the one who was foretold. They say that touching this feather shows you the truth behind every illusion, and that is what you need to carry out my task. As well, it commands all the birds of the air," she said. "I have need of your help in a certain matter ..."

He spoke before she could go on. "Yes," he said, "I will help you in any way I can."

She looked at him gravely, "You don't know what I'm going to ask you, or what it may cost you to help me," she said.

"Nevertheless, I will help you in any way I can, and the cost does not concern me," Karl said.

She looked at him for a long time then she smiled. For Karl that smile was more than adequate compensation for anything he might do, even laying down his life. "Thank you, my lord," she said, "May I know your name?" Karl told her his name and she said, "Thank you, Karl. My husband is or was — for I do not know whether he is dead or alive — a nephew of a powerful witch, and among us all such witches are named Baba Yaga. My husband is gone, and I rule here alone. But my daughter, my only child, has gone too, and I think that my husband left her with his aunt, Baba Yaga. Will you find Baba Yaga and see if she has my daughter, Karl?"

"Yes, my lady," said Karl, "I will find Baba Yaga, and if she has your daughter I will bring her back to you."

The Tsaretsa looked at him and said, "That is more than I asked of you, Karl."

He bowed to her and said, "Nevertheless, I will do it, or die."

A deed is a long time doing, but it is short in the telling: it took more than one day for Karl to prepare himself and his horse and find the direction in which to look for the country of Baba Yaga, the Tsaretsa's mother-in-law. But whether it took a short time or a long time, at last he was ready, and he went to say farewell to the Tsaretsa.

"You have not asked me how I will

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

reward you if you bring me back my daughter," the Tsaretsa said.

Karl looked at her and shook his head, "There is no need to speak of rewards to me, my Lady. I will gladly serve you without any reward. Only, if I please you in this, let me continue to serve you."

The Tsaretsa smiled, "That is easy to grant," she said.

Karl went out from her and rode many days on the strength of that smile. At last he came to a way where the road he had been taking divided into three parts. There were signs at each road, written in letters he had learned to read in his travels in Rus. On the first road the sign said, "If you take this road, you and your horse will die." On the second road it said, "If you take this road, your horse will live and you will die." And on the third road the sign said, "If you take this road, you will live and your horse will die."

Karl groaned aloud, for his horse had served him faithfully in many adventures, and he would have given almost anything to save his horse. But he had no choice. If he retraced his steps his horse would not die, but his quest would not be accomplished and he could not bear to think of the face of the Tsaretsa if he returned without accomplishing his quest, or if days and weeks and months and years went by, and she heard nothing of his quest.

"My good horse," he said. "Each of us has to die, and some of us die for others, while some of us die for no reason we can see. Will you take the right-hand path, my noble steed?" The horse looked at the signs as if he could read them, then he bowed his head for a moment and took the right-hand path, without any guidance from the reins. They rode a long time or a short time, who can say, and then a grey wolf came from the bushes at the side of the trail, and killed the horse with a single slash of his fangs.

Karl jumped from his dying horse and faced the wolf with spear and shield, but the wolf turned and ran and Karl was left with the dead horse. "My good horse," said Karl, "I cannot stop to bury your body now, but I will come back to do you whatever honor I can." And hanging his saddle bags from his spear, Karl trudged off down the road.

After a long time to Karl, though perhaps it was shorter than it seemed, he reached a village. It seemed peaceful enough, but there was something secretive about it, and the men who passed Karl as he walked down the only street of the village did not look him in the eyes, though he had the feeling that they looked round at him once he had passed them. He came to an inn and went in. The innkeeper looked at him but did not speak.

"My horse has been killed," said Karl, "do you know where I might get another?"

The man hesitated and said slowly, "This is a bad country for horses. The only horses near here belong to the Lady at the castle."

Karl asked him "Do you think that the Lady might sell me a horse?"

The landlord looked at him and said, "She might trade you for a horse. She sometimes has need of a man such as you."

Karl wondered what the man meant by "a man such as you." An armored man? A man who lacked something he needed to carry on his concerns? "How do I find this lady?" he said.

"Follow the road," the innkeeper said, "It only leads to Her land."

Karl nodded. This village had the air of one which waited at the gates of something powerful and was afraid to talk about it. He wondered if he said the words "Baba Yaga" how the innkeeper might react. Karl walked down the road, carrying his saddle bags on his spear. He had not taken any rest or refreshment at the inn: it did not seem a place to take rest or refreshment.

When he caught a glimpse of a grey form out of the corner of his eye, he shook the saddle bags off his spear, and cast it at the wolf. A cry came from the wolf, and it ran off, carrying Karl's spear in its side. The person who it had seemed to be chasing was a young child, barefoot and tousle headed, very small, but not at all afraid.

"You chased the grey wolf away," the child said.

"It looked like the wolf who killed my horse," said Karl. "Was it a friend of yours?"

The child shook its head. "Not a friend, but not quite an enemy," it said. "More like ... one who guards me. Or perhaps keeps me prisoner. Sometimes it's hard to tell."

Karl nodded. "Sometimes it is hard to tell," he said. "Much may depend on the reason why someone keeps you safe: whether it is for your sake or not."

"I don't think that it was for my sake," said the child. "Are you going up to the castle? I'll come with you for a way."

They walked companionably along the road. The child offered to carry Karl's saddle bags, but feeling the weight of the saddle bags and looking at the small form in front of him, Karl gruffly refused. "My name is Karl," he told the child.

After walking a little the child said, "They call me Ivanushka." A certain idea began to grow in Karl's mind, but he reminded himself that he really needed a horse to get back — a good horse to outrun pursuit if it should come to that. And the Lady at the castle had horses, and perhaps men to ride them. And also the same impulse in his nature that had sent him to see the dragon told him that he had never seen a Baba Yaga, and would like to see what happened if he did.

Presently they came in sight of the castle, and the child said, "There's Her place," and lifting a hand in farewell went off down a side road. Karl thought that the child would find him again more easily than he could find the child, knowing the ways of this place as Karl did not.

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At the outer gate of the castle, Karl knocked on the door with a mailed fist. Presently servants came and let him in, leading him without a word into the great room of the castle, where the Lady awaited him. The Lady was beautiful beyond the dreams of men, but Karl looked at her unmoved. If he had not seen the Tsaretsa, he might have fallen to that beauty and he might not have. But as it was, his heart was armored. Also he had a shrewd suspicion that the beautiful face he saw was not the way this woman really looked.

Under pretense of bowing to the Lady, Karl put his hand into the armor at his breast and put his little finger into the box with the Firebird's feather. A piercing pain came from his finger, but as he straightened up he saw the Lady as she really was. Her hair was grey, and although her face had beauty, it was a terrible beauty, enough to make any mortal man run away, if he did not stay transfixed by that beauty.

"Lady," said Karl, "I am a knight without a horse. I am told that you have many horses. Would you grant me one as a favor?"

The Lady looked at him, perhaps displeased by his bluntness, and his disregard for her apparent beauty. "And what favor will you do me?" she said, and Karl thought that her voice was her true voice, deep and yet very feminine, the voice of an older woman than she appeared to be.

"Why, Lady," he said, "whatever I can do without breaking the oaths I have already made. For you know that a knight is his honor and a knight without honor is no knight."

She looked at him, and he tried to make his face go a little slack and foolish, as if he were bedazzled by her beauty.

She said, as if to herself, "And yet a knight without honor may be what I need. Let us see if you can keep those oaths." Then speaking directly to him she said, "There is a herd of horses in the meadow outside my castle. They have a tendency to stray away. Choose one of them and ride him. If you can keep the rest from straying away for three days, the horse will be yours, and you may ask me one other boon."

Karl nodded his head. He thought that this being, whatever it really was, would keep her promise, but that she was very sure she would never have to keep it, so certain was she that he would fail. Well, time would tell about that. He accepted her hospitality and lay down to sleep that night in a chamber which was grand and yet comfortable: he remembered humbler, but much more comfortable, accommodations at the Tsaretsa's house.

In the morning he saw a great herd of magnificent horses let loose from the stables and he followed them into the pasture, telling the servants that he would choose his horse after watching them for a while. The horses competed among themselves, running races with each other, both stallions and mares except for one horse which cropped quietly at the turf and paid no attention to the races. Karl walked up to the horse and put a saddle on it and mounted it. Before he could put the horse to the test he saw the child Ivanushka watching him from under a tree nearby. "Why did you choose that horse?" Ivanushka said.

"A horse who does not race with the other horses may simply lack the spirit to compete," said Karl. "But this horse looked as if he were a seasoned warrior watching the recruits practice war. I may be wrong, but I think that he did not race because he knew that the others could not compete with him."

Ivanushka laughed. "You're right," the child said. "This one is the King of the horses. Try him."

Karl touched the horse with his heels and immediately the horse exploded into action, galloping past the leaders of the race as if they were standing still. Karl pulled on the reins and the King

horse ran so fast that he circled the rest of the herd and gradually forced them into a compact mass with the King horse ready to dash out and run down any horse who departed from that mass. Karl circled around and came to where Ivanushka stood, the horse poised to go if any of the other horses wandered too far.

"Very good," said Ivanushka. "But if you keep them in a group like that they won't get their exercise. But if you let them graze and run races sooner or later they'll slip away from you. No one is stealing the horses really. *She's* trained them to slip away and hide, so that anyone trying to keep the horses from disappearing will fail. Then after the person trying to herd the horses gives up, *She* sends out a magical call to bring them back."

"By 'She' you mean the Lady of the castle," said Karl.

Ivanushka shrugged. "That's one of her names," the child said. "I just call her Aunt."

Karl nodded. "Yes," he said, "Aunt Baba Yaga."

Ivanushka looked at him. "Perhaps," the child said. "And if so, what of it?"

Karl nodded. "Nothing — for now," he said. "Later we will talk more of this. Where do the horses hide when they slip away?"

Ivanushka grinned. "Usually in the woods near the hornets' nests."

"If someone disturbed the hornets' nests, they might come back to the meadow faster than they went," said Karl with an air of innocence.

"But who would do that?" said Ivanushka with an equal air of innocence. "After all, they might get stung."

Karl nodded. "Unless they were very clever."

Ivanushka nodded and Karl thought he didn't need to say any more. The child would help him, he thought: the casual mention of the hornets' nests showed that. If he was mistaken about that, he might be mistaken about other things.

It was a long day, and Karl didn't have to pretend to be weary in the afternoon. He did pretend to fall asleep, and watched from slitted eyes that looked closed from a distance as the horses slipped off, until only Karl and the King of the horses were left in the meadow. Then he waited, the tension growing as the rest of the afternoon slipped by. Just as Karl was about to give up he heard noises in the woods. A group of large heavy creatures was plunging through the woods, and as they came closer, he could hear the buzzing of the hornets. Then one after the other the herd of horses came out of the woods and into the meadow.

As they came out Karl and the King of the horses herded them into a group and herded the group in the direction of the stables. By the time they got to the stables the hornets had mostly given up their pursuit of the horses, and, except for an occasionally shying movement when one of the remaining hornets came up close to them, the horses were mostly calmed down. Karl swung down off the King horse, led him to the place in the stable that was plainly for the best of the horses, and cleaned and groomed the King horse himself. Then he headed toward the castle.

As he came into the gates he reached his hand into his armor and thrust his ring finger into the box with the Firebird's feather. A new sharp pain in that finger was added to the old throbbing pain in his little finger, and Karl saw the castle as it really was; a great box of a house, without doors or windows, kept off the ground by a series of legs that might have been the legs of a monstrous chicken. There were some rough outbuildings around the house, and he was glad to see that the places he had eaten and slept were outside the house of Baba Yaga. He thought that if one went into that house it would be a very hard job to get out.

He cast a glance at the castle ser-

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vants, and thought that they were not as human as they appeared on the outside: certain movements and the look in their eyes made him wonder if they were the result of some of Baba Yaga's enchantments. Presently they brought him some food, and he ate, and slept until the next morning.

In the morning the King horse greeted him with a whinny, and seemed as eager as Karl himself to get out to the meadow. About the middle of the morning Ivanushka appeared and Karl said, "Where do you think the horses will hide today?"

Ivanushka grinned and said, "They'll go down to the lake. *She's* given them a spell so that they'll look like waves on the shore. She wasn't pleased that the hornets drove them back to you, but she's not entirely sure that it wasn't an accident."

Karl looked at Ivanushka and said softly, "I wonder what might drive the horses out of the water, as the hornets drove them out of the woods?"

Ivanushka said casually, "There are snapping fish in the water. If someone throws raw meat into the water, they go into a frenzy, and they'd attack the horses, despite the enchantment. They can smell them."

Karl nodded. Later that afternoon he pretended to sleep, and when the horses slipped away, he rode into the woods and set traps for some of the woodland creatures. There had never been trapping in those woods so the creatures were unwary and soon the traps were full. Karl killed the creatures which had not been killed by the traps and cut the meat into rough chunks with his sword. Then, mounting the King horse, he rode along the shore, throwing the meat into the water. Then he waited.

Presently the waves dashed on the shore, even though there was no wind. Eventually the horses had to come so far from the shore that the enchantment would no longer work, and they could be seen as horses, even though they still had a foamy look about them. Karl used the King horse to round them up and drive them back to the stables. This time the King horse had to nip at some of the stallions to make them come into the herd, and even threaten to kick a few. Karl drove them into the stable, groomed the King horse, ate and went to sleep. But his heart was heavy, for he knew the witch would be suspicious, and the last day would be many times as difficult as the first two.

In the morning he drove the horses out into the pasture and the King horse was as nervous as he was, but they were both eager for the last day. This time Ivanushka was there already when they arrived and said to Karl, "She knows that you know. This time she has given the horses an enchantment so they can fly. They will gather in the topmost branches of the trees in the wood, and you can do nothing to get them down."

Karl smiled at Ivanushka gravely and said, "Don't despair. Will every horse have the power to fly?"

Ivanushka stared at him. "Yes, even your horse. So you can get to them, but I do not think that even the King horse can force them to come down, but if he does the enchantment ends, because if a horse gets a foot on the ground, the enchantment ends."

"I'll have to think about this," said Karl, and this time Ivanushka did not go away, but sat on the ground beside Karl's horse, looking at him anxiously. Finally Karl pretended to go to sleep, and watched behind slitted eyes as each of the horses jumped up into the air and floated like a cloud up near the tops of the trees. From the ground, at any rate, each of the horses looked cloudy, so that if you tried to look directly at them they looked like a cloud, and only looking out of the corner of one's eye could you see that the cloud was a horse. It was a very good enchantment and Karl sat on his horse and admired it for a while.

Then he raised his hand and urged his horse upward. With a mighty spring the King horse leapt into the sky and soared far above the other horses. Karl took the box from his chest armor, and took off the lid, so that the shining feather within cast its light all above and around. From all parts of the sky birds began flying toward that light. When some of the birds had almost reached him, Karl urged his horse down among the cloudy horses, dodging in and out among them. The birds pursued him, bumping into the cloudy horses and sometimes using their beaks if the horses did not get out of the way. The horses began to panic, and headed for the familiar ground, each losing its ability to fly once it had touched a hoof to the ground.

When all of the horse herd had landed except his own, Karl closed the box and put it away. His whole hand ached from holding the box aloft, and this was added to the pain from his two fingers. Karl used the King horse, who was still flying in the air, to drive the herd of horses to the stables. Then he let the King horse descend almost to the ground, dismounted with a leap, and said to the King horse, "Wait here until I come back." The King horse flew a little bit more up into the air, so the stable hands could not get hold of him, and then waited, floating in the air.

"Take me to your mistress," he told the servants, and they led him into the

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

house. Waiting there was Ivanushka, who gave him a grin. "Lady," said Karl, "I have herded your horses for three days, and I have not lost a one. I claim the horse I rode and the boon you promised me."

"You are the first man to herd my horses," said the Lady of the castle, "and the stake which was sharpened for your head will have to go empty. You have claimed a good horse: what boon do you want besides?"

Karl looked at her and then at Ivanushka. "I would like to take your grandniece back to her mother," he said.

The Lady of the castle changed her appearance and he saw a bony-legged figure sitting in a pestle with a mortar in one hand and a broom in the other, but he knew this was just as much an illusion as the fair figure he had seen on his arrival.

"Do you dare to ask this of me?" the figure asked.

"Yes, Lady, I dare to ask," said Karl.

Ivanushka turned toward him and said, "I would never have helped you if I knew you wanted to take me away. I like living in the village. I don't want to go back to the court."

Karl said gently, "I would not like to make you do anything you don't want to do, my friend. But your mother misses you very much."

Ivanushka looked at him and said, "Why can't she come and live in the village with me?"

"She has responsibilities, my friend," said Karl. "She cannot always please herself, but if you will come back with me, I will ask her to give you as much freedom as she can. She wants your happiness, as do I. Do you remember your mother?"

Ivanushka looked at Baba Yaga and said, "It is very difficult to think of her."

Karl said gently, "She misses you very much."

Ivanushka was silent for a while, seeming to be thinking and remembering, then she turned to Baba Yaga and said, "I want to go with him."

Baba Yaga scowled at her and said, "All right, but if I can catch you after giving you the start of an hour, you must stay with me for seven years, and if I can catch him he will have to serve me for seven years."

Ivanushka nodded and said, "Done," and her voice for a moment was very much like the voice of her great-aunt. "Let's go," she said to Karl and they walked out of Baba Yaga's house together.

They walked to where Karl had left the King horse, and Karl tossed Ivanushka into the saddle and said, "Run for your mother's palace with only your weight. This horse will outdistance my pursuit. I'll try to lead anyone who follows you astray, and I may well escape."

Ivanushka looked at him and said, "I remember now I am the Princess Maria, and I command you Karl to mount this horse of yours and come with me. We will either win back together or serve my aunt for seven years together."

"My lady," said Karl and leaped into the saddle behind her, for there was no time for debate, and perhaps — a very faint perhaps — they might escape together.

They rode off through the air, covering all the ground that Karl had trudged with the saddle bags over his spear, and were almost back to where Karl had lost his horse before Princess Maria said, "I think the hour is up, she'll catch us easily in the air: we need to descend to the ground and conceal ourselves." Karl urged the King horse downward, and as its hoof touched the ground, it lost its ability to fly. They were at the place where the wolf had killed Karl's old horse, and his horse lay on the ground there, stark and stiff.

"Put your horse in the bog yonder," said Princess Maria, "and leave me with the King horse." Karl stripped the saddle and other accouterments from his old horse, and dragged it to the bog.

"Do me this one last service, friend," said Karl, and cast his horse into the bog. When he returned he found the King horse lying on the ground, and Princess Maria had painted it with paints she had taken from her pocket, so that it had the markings of his old horse, and it looked as if its throat had been torn out.

"Lay here quietly," said Princess Maria, "if you wish to escape my aunt's service."

The horse whinnied and then lay still.

"Now we must conceal ourselves," said Princess Maria, and Karl took her to the stream that ran through the swamp, and they entered the water. Karl cut reeds and when they heard a whistling sound in the sky they ducked under the water and breathed through the reeds. Overhead there passed a figure, and when Karl dared to come up from the water he saw off in the distance a figure in a pestle, with a mortar held before it and a broom held behind, skidding across the sky.

"*She* made an agreement with my father that she would not enter the kingdom that he and my mother ruled," said Princess Maria. "So she'll patrol the border for a long time, thinking that we've come some unexpected way."

Karl nodded. "So it's worth the chance of heading straight for the border from here," he said. "She'll think that if we were on a direct course she'd have seen us by now."

They mounted the horse and rode on a long way. It was already getting dark when they came to a small cabin at the edge of a wood. "Stop here," said Princess Maria. She slid down from the horse and said to the cabin, "Stand with your door to the woods." The cabin heaved itself up on legs like a chicken and faced the woods, then it crouched down again and looked like an ordinary house. "We can sleep here, and no one will bother us," said Princess Maria. "In fact, no one will even see us: when the cabin has its door to the woods it and those who live in it are invisible to all others."

Karl wondered if a magical house like this might be known to Baba Yaga, and perhaps with her powers she might even overcome the enchantment and find them within, but he swallowed his doubts, and said to Princess Maria, "As you say, Princess."

He led the King horse into the door and it trotted quietly into a corner, where he took off its saddle and groomed it as best he could.

"There is food for the horse and some simple food for us in the cupboards there," Princess Maria said.

Karl opened the cupboard, and found a bucket of oats for the horse and some dried meat and hard cheese. There was a big bottle of wine, and when he turned away from the cupboard he saw that Princess Maria had found a bucket and a jug and brought water in, perhaps from a nearby well. There were pottery plates and cups in the cupboard, and they ate at a table in the center of the room. The bucket of water Princess Maria gave to the horse, along with some of the oats that Karl had found.

Maria poured herself a glass of water with a little wine in it, and Karl watered his wine: he wanted to have his wits about him. After dinner they made a fire in the fireplace and sat there,

talking quietly. Presently Princess Maria lay down on the bed which was in the room, and Karl wrapped himself in his cloak, and lay across the threshold of the door, sleeping a little and watching a lot. In the morning, Princess Maria took some of the oats which they had not given to the horse, and made an oat gruel, which they had with water for breakfast.

"The problem, my lady," said Karl to the Princess, "is how to get across the border into your mother's kingdom without being caught by your aunt."

Princess Maria nodded. "She'll be looking for three of us," she said. "So I think that the first thing to do is to send the King horse across the border, as far from here as possible." She turned to the King horse and said, "Meet us in the water meadow." The horse whinnied, touched Karl with his nose, and then bowed to the princess, his front foot stretched out and his head touching the ground. Then he left the cabin, and for a while they could hear his galloping hooves.

Princess Maria said, "He didn't come under the threat to have to serve her for seven years if she catches him, but I think that on his own without having to worry about a rider, he can probably slip across the border. But now the question is how do you and I cross the border?"

Karl said, "Lady, if you would cross alone, while I create a diversion ..."

She shook her head. "That is what she expects, and she will be on the lookout for it. The only way for us both to get across is for you to cross over while *I* create a diversion. You must trust me in this, Karl. Take off your armor and lay it on the ground with your sword and shield. I will give you a belt that you must put on, and you must cross the border in the form that belt gives you."

Karl was moved to protest, but he had trusted her so far, and he was not about to not trust her now, simply because he was older and more war-wise than she was. He stripped off his armor, while she went behind a screen, and then he handed his armor over the screen. When she passed him a belt, he hesitated to put it on, but then a masked figure came out from behind the screen, wearing his armor. Perhaps the figure was a little smaller than his own, but it was much larger than he would have thought. Perhaps she had changed her own shape beneath that armor.

At a nod from the armored figure he put on the belt, and at once he felt his shape shift, until he had the form of a great hawk.

"Fly to my mother," a voice came from somewhere in the room and, hardly knowing what he did, the hawk which had been Karl leapt up into the air and flew straight for the border. The armored figure came out of the cabin and headed for the border on the ground, running so fast that it kept pace with him. As they neared the border, the hawk which had been Karl saw the figure of Baba Yaga, flying in the air in her pestle, and coming toward him.

Then the Baba Yaga saw the figure on the ground, and after a moment's hesitation veered off from Karl and headed towards the figure on the ground, As Baba Yaga approached it, the armored figure seemed to explode, scattering Karl's armor far and wide. At the same time the hawk which had been Karl crossed the border, his heart aching with a sorrow which his animal form could hardly contain. But he could not help himself, he flew straight for the Tsaretsa's house, as if he were bound to this action.

When the hawk which had been Karl came to the Tsaretsa's house, he flew straight into a room which was evidently a private room of the Tsaretsa. As he landed he felt the belt which he had been wearing slip off his waist. At once he regained his human form, and when he saw the Tsaretsa regarding him without fear he began to say "Lady, I have failed you." But before all the words could come out of his mouth, the belt hit the floor, and there standing as she had stood in the meadow was the child he had called Ivanushka. What had come out of his throat was, "Lady, I have ..." and the Tsaretsa nodded calmly.

"Yes, Karl, you have succeeded," she said. "How are you, Marushka?"

The child went and embraced her mother, and as they clung together Karl saw for the first time that the one he had called "Ivanushka" was not only a child, but a beautiful young girl.

Princess Maria turned toward him, her arm still about her mother, and said quietly, "I was in the belt, Karl, and the figure in armor was only an illusion. Thank you for trusting me."

The Tsaretsa stretched out her hands and said to Karl, "Give me your hands."

When Karl stretched out his hand the Tsaretsa saw the scars on his hands and said, "You have suffered to bring about what I wanted, Karl."

Karl nodded his head, "Lady," he said, "whatever it takes to do your will, I will do. Will you take me into your service?"

The Tsaretsa looked at him for a long time and said softly, "It might be better for you if I did not."

"Lady," said Karl, "this is what I want for whatever service I have done for you. But I have done little. Your daughter, once reminded of you, could have saved herself."

Princess Maria regarded him and said quietly, "I played a part, Karl, but yours were the actions which started it all. You do not offer to serve me, Karl, but if my mother refuses your service, I would be glad if you would serve me."

The Tsaretsa smiled and said, "Oh no, my daughter, this one is vowed to my service. Because I love you, you may command my knight Karl, but he serves you for my sake."

Karl smiled at Princess Maria and said, "You are always my friend, Princess, but your mother is right. First I am vowed to her service. But any service which I cannot do for her sake, I will do for the sake of friendship."

The Tsaretsa nodded. "You will have knights of your own, Marushka, but this one is mine. And your friend, too, do not regard that too lightly."

Princess Maria grinned a grin which reminded Karl of the first time he had met her. "Treat him well, Mother," she said, "Or I may steal him from you. Karl, you have a horse to meet in the water meadow, and then you will want to see the court armorer to replace the armor I used. We may need you again soon, and I want you to be prepared. While you do that, I need to talk to my mother, the Tsaretsa Eikaterina."

Karl saluted both of them and went out to find the King horse and to get new armor. He thought that the service of those two would have its challenges and its dangers, but that there was nothing that he would rather do. And whatever happened in the future, he was sure he would never be bored.

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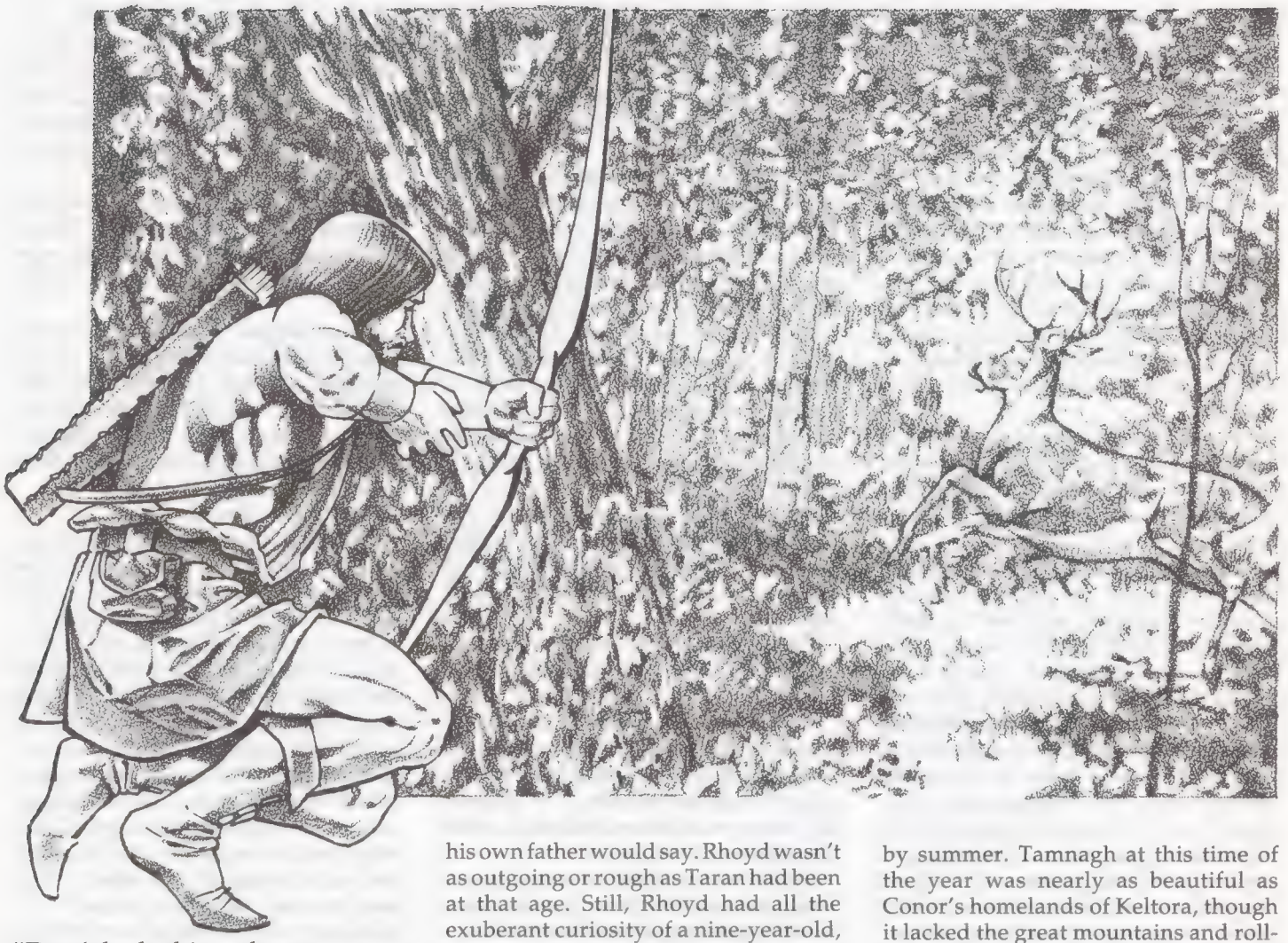
Richard Purtill teaches philosophy at Western Washington University in Bellingham, WA. He has written three fantasy novels based on Greek mythology, one science fiction novel, a mystery, and numerous short stories.

Margaret Organ-Kean illustrates frequently for these pages.



the hunter's tale

by Laura J. Underwood

"Don't be larking about near that knowe, Rhoyd," Conor Manahan called across camp as he loosened old Battlebrute's girth. The huge dun warhorse grunted and flicked his tail in agitation, eager to roll in the grass. "Those old mounds are dangerous for young lads."

Blue eyes sharp as the summer sky flashed their keen disappointment in Conor's direction. The mercenary sighed, for it was hard to look past that innocent plea sometimes. But he'd been father to one before, and though this lad was very different from that which he sired himself, in some ways the one he'd lost and the lad now pouting were alike.

"The heart of a lad is full of adventure," his own father would say. Rhoyd wasn't as outgoing or rough as Taran had been at that age. Still, Rhoyd had all the exuberant curiosity of a nine-year-old, which could be vexing at times. The lad might have seen more years than his looks told one at first glance, but he was mageborn which made it all the more trying. The magic in him would not let him grow as quickly in mind and body as other lads.

"We've camp to set first," Conor went on and caught the amusement brightening his healer wife Eithne's dark eyes. She knew where all this was leading. "Once that's done, if we've light enough left to us, we'll go for a look."

The hope sprang back into Rhoyd's expression. He bolted as though elfshot. "I'll fetch the firewood," he said eagerly, racing towards the deadfall at the edge of the woods made dark green by summer. Tamnagh at this time of the year was nearly as beautiful as Conor's homelands of Keltora, though it lacked the great mountains and rolling moors.

"Just make certain you keep the glamorie out of it, lad," Conor said and sighed. He did not forbid the lad to practice his magic, but there were times when it was not wise. Not everyone in Ard-Taebh was as understanding as Conor thought himself. He caught Eithne's shake of her head.

"All right, woman," he groused, pulling the saddle free. Battlebrute shook himself like a dog coming out of water, flinging flecks of foam and sweat back at his master who glowered at the beast. "Have your say."

"What's to say?" she replied with a glance towards the rest of the small party they rode with through the

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

Tamnagh forest. A farmer and his family, unable to afford the services of a sword arm on the long journey home from the borders of Elenthorn to the north, were unpacking their own gear for the night. Conor, upon hearing their plight, had quipped that he and his were going the same way and would have no objection to a little company, and the farmer looked much relieved. He was an old man with only one son, a daughter-in-law and two grandsons barely bearded to accompany them, and not one of them knew which end of a sword was sharpest, in Conor's estimation.

"But you really shouldn't give in to him so easily, you know," Eithne went on. "His Aunt Genna did warn us that indulging a mageborn child is never wise."

Conor said nothing. He knew his look alone expressed his feelings towards the lad's mageborn aunt and her lofty opinions. She'd never raised a son, mageborn or otherwise. *I raised a son until a bandit's blade took him, but I still remember how it's done.* And perhaps he did overly indulge Rhoyd at times, but the lad had been born to a terrible, abusive man, and Conor wisely compared it with taking in a dog that had been beaten into submission by its last owner. Slow and gentle was the best way to win confidence. Besides, Rhoyd was a bright lad and learned what limits could not be pushed to keep from getting his trews dusted. Conor might indulge, but he never tolerated blatant disobedience. He also knew lads forgot themselves at time, having been one once, and one didn't need to beat them sore for every little crime.

Camp was up in short order, and there was still a good bit of sun filtering through the trees when Conor found a small presence at his side. The tall, fire-haired Keltoran cast a look down at blue eyes, a long mop of black hair and a fey-featured face full of suppressed eagerness.

"We'll be back at sundown, woman," he called in a resigned manner, "if not before." He adjusted the three ells of his blue and black plaid, all that marriage and fathering a son had left him. He no longer kilted it about him, for in the rest of Ard-Taebh, Keltoran traditions were of no use to him. In fact, service in the High King's Militia during the Last War, when the Hound of the Blackthorn invaded the southern lands, had pushed many of the old traditions out of Conor's life.

Rhoyd bolted for the path to the knowe, forcing Conor to call the lad back. "These auld mounds sometimes have weak spots, lad," Conor said. "Best ye let me lead."

Rhoyd nodded, slowing his pace to match Conor's careful advance. The mercenary studied the ground. He'd seen perfectly good paths become gaping holes in some of these old barrows. Most folk thought them just hills, but Conor knew the signs. The stones stacked in cairns to either side of the path at intervals were not the work of nature. One of them showed evidence of old offerings, bits of hide and bone and broken antlers. *Cernunnos,* the mercenary thought.

"We've a hunter's grave under our feet, I'll warrant," Conor said softly, stopping to finger a bit of the tattered offering dried and polished by years of exposure.

"A hunter's grave?" Rhoyd repeated. "Why build such a mound to a mere hunter?"

"Hunters are important men, lad," Conor said, moving on. "Why, when I was a lad, there was a tale I used to hear about the greatest hunter alive. So great, his fame spread far and wide across the kingdoms of Ard-Taebh."

Rhoyd had stopped to study the offering as well, but now Conor heard small feet pelting up the path to catch the mercenary. Thin fingers slipped into Conor's off hand. Rhoyd knew to leave the sword hand free in case of danger. "What was this man's name?" the boy asked.

Conor grinned, never one to turn down an invitation to share one of his tales. There were those who said Conor had a bard's soul in a mercenary's braw body. Rhoyd delighted in this, which pleased Conor. He liked watching the lad's eyes widen to hear another tale.

"He was Malcolm MacRoe of Keltora," Conor said.

"And how did everyone know he was the greatest hunter in Ard-Taebh?" Rhoyd said.

"His reputation preceded him, of course," Conor replied.

"It was said he could put an arrow through the heart of a stag at five hundred paces and drop the beast in its tracks every time. That he could course hawk and hare with the speed of the wind on foot."

"No man can run *that* fast," Rhoyd muttered.

"No man, mayhaps," Conor said. "There were those who said Malcolm MacRoe was not a mortal man at all, but the son of Cernunnos himself, beget on the wife of Cormac MacRoe who was said to be so beautiful, the god coveted her ..."

"Why would Cernunnos want her if she was another man's wife?" Rhoyd interrupted. "I didn't think you were supposed to want another man's wife..."

Conor smiled. "You'll understand when you're older, lad," he said, and thought, *And only the gods know when that 'twill be.* Rhoyd's mask of uncertainty assured Conor the lad was trying to reason it out now. "Do you want to hear my story or not, lad?"

"Yes," Rhoyd said.

"As I said, there were those who believed Malcolm's prowess as a hunter was in his fey blood, for he ne'er missed his mark nor lost track of his quarry."

They had reached the summit of the grassy mound, and there Conor found the ruins of fallen menhirs that had once formed a circle. *'Tis an ancient place,* he thought and sat on one of the stones to view the tops of trees washed under the setting sun. The air did possess a faint tingle of old magic. Conor might not be mageborn, but he could feel such things all the same, for his own mother had been birthed by a cousin of the same mageborn line that produced the boy now boldly claiming a comfortable seat in the mercenary's lap to hear the rest of the tale.

"Never?" Rhoyd marveled.

"Never," Conor repeated and wrapped strong arms around those thin shoulders in a brief hug. "Or so they said, and therein lies the sad tale beneath it all."

"I don't like sad tales," Rhoyd muttered.

"Oh, it's not so sad as to have you crying in your ale."

"I don't like ale."

"When you're older," Conor said, and Rhoyd snorted in rebuke. "Now, there came a day when Malcolm MacRoe fell in love with the fair-haired daughter of the Laird of Dun Gormwood. Her name was Fiona, and she was of such moonlight beauty that Malcolm found himself pining for her company every moment he was away. Alas, she was as cold as moonlight to his affections, for they said she had lost her heart to one of the Unseelie."

"A Dark One?" Rhoyd ventured,

brightening. "Like the ancient enemies of the Old Ones." Mageborn were said to have been descended from the latter.

"Aye," Conor said. "They thought he was a dark lord of Annwn, but she did not know his true name. She had been bathing in a river when he came upon her, and so powerful and handsome was the very sight of him, she swooned. He took her there on the banks of the river ..."

"Took her where?" Rhoyd asked. Conor bit his tongue, for it has crossed his mind to quip, "For a hard ride, my lad," but Rhoyd was apt to repeat the phrase, and Conor would hear no end of it from Eithne. "When you're older," he said, and laughed when Rhoyd's face twisted in utter exasperation. "Suffice to say that she was now bound to crave his company, body and soul, and she pined for him every minute he was out of her sight.

"Her father, of course, was furious, for a maiden who knows an Unseelie's touch is often destined to die, drained of life and will. Her father offered her hand and a pouch of gold to any man who could slay the creature and set her free of its curse. Malcolm MacRoe swore he would fulfill that geas.

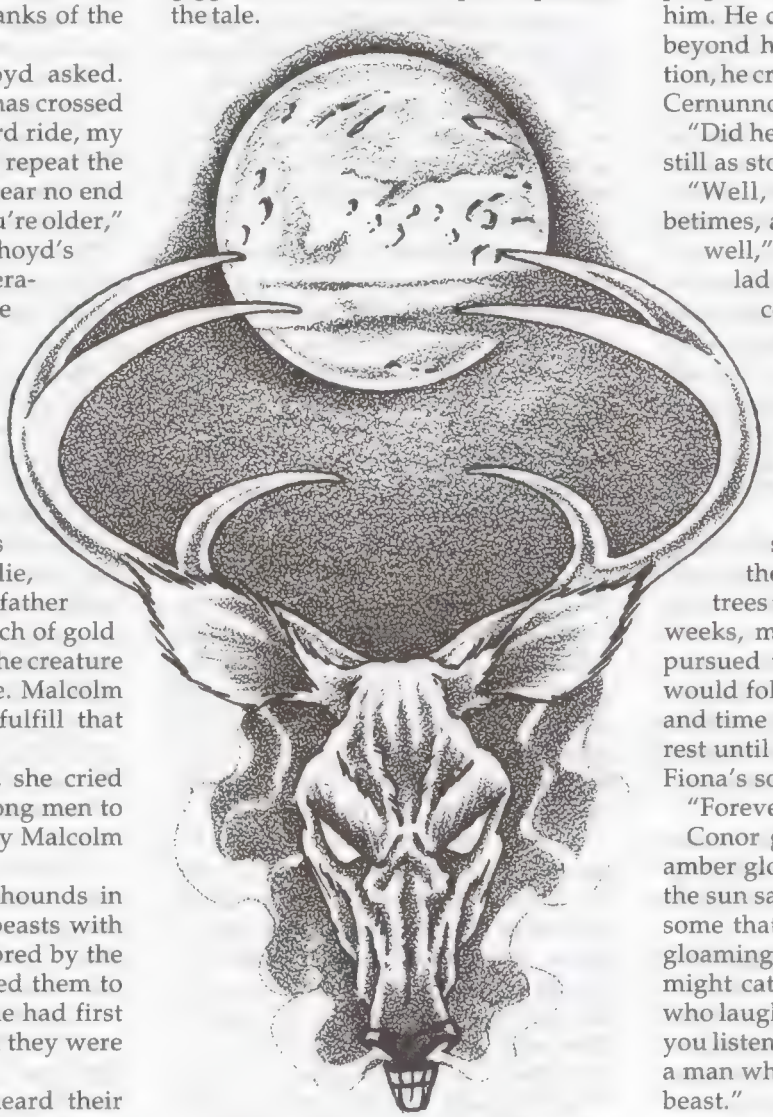
"When Fiona heard this, she cried and wailed, and it took strong men to lock her in her room the day Malcolm left.

"Malcolm took the best hounds in the kingdom, great white beasts with red ears said to have been bred by the Old Ones themselves. He led them to the bank where the Unseelie had first taken the maiden, and soon they were in hot pursuit.

"The fiend, of course, heard their dreadful bay, and quickly changed into a black stag with antlers the color of blood. This did not deter Malcolm in the least. Day and night, he pursued the Unseelie through wooded glen and across bare moors. One by one, his hounds fell in their tracks until Malcolm ran on alone. For the blood of the god was in him, and that, coupled with his love of Fiona, gave him a muckle heart.

"At last, the black stag began to lag, and Malcolm drew closer on its heels. Until at last, the beast could run no more. It staggered its way up onto a barrow mound much like this one, collapsing to its knees amid a ring of old stones. Malcolm clambered to the top, drew an arrow from his quiver, one with a head of steel on a rowan shaft, and nocked the arrow on his bowstring."

Conor leaned over the lad's shoulder and lifted his arms as though helping him to draw sight on a target. Rhoyd giggled to find himself a participant in the tale.



"And pre- pared to send it straight into the foul creature's evil heart. Alas, all was not as well as he thought, for a woman's stricken wail filled the air. Malcolm had made his release only to find his beloved Fiona rushing across the mound. She was ragged from exertion, and her hair was matted and tangled with twigs and leaves. She looked like one of the bansidhe. In her madness, she had escaped her father's house, and now she raced across the mound to throw herself in the arrow's path."

"He *killed* her?" Rhoyd muttered.

"Aye," Conor said. "She fell against the black hart, her blood staining his ebon hide. And with her last breath, she kissed the stag. Well, that kiss had the power of love under an enchantment behind it, and as she died, the stag sprang to health again. With an evil laugh, it fled for the forest.

"Malcolm cried out in anguish, dropping his bow and drawing Fiona to him. He called her name, but she was beyond his reckoning, so in desperation, he cried to his true father, begging Cernunnos to restore Fiona's life."

"Did he?" Rhoyd ventured, growing still as stone.

"Well, the gods are a fickle lot betimes, and they have their limits as well," Conor said and hugged the lad to reassure him. "Cernunnos could not answer Malcolm's request. The Unseelie had taken the soul from her flesh, and only the creature's death could set her soul free.

"Malcolm became a man torn by grief and loss. He seized up his bow, cursing the Unseelie, and drove into the trees to follow the black stag. Days, weeks, months went by, and still he pursued the Unseelie, and vowed he would follow to the ends of the world and time itself, and that he would not rest until the black hart was dead and Fiona's soul was free."

"Forever?" Rhoyd ventured.

Conor grinned, glancing out at the amber glow that was filling the sky as the sun sank over the trees. "There are some that will tell you that when the gloaming falls on the deep wood, you might catch a glimpse of a black stag who laughs as he races the wind, and if you listen, you can hear the weeping of a man who follows, vowing to kill the beast."

A dubious face glanced up at him. "Have you seen them?" Rhoyd insisted.

Conor shook his head. "No, but I met a grizzled auld shepherd once who claimed he did as he told me that very tale. Now, we'd best be getting back down to the camp. 'Twill be dark soon, and I've no desire to find that goat's path in the gloaming." He lifted the lad, set him on his feet and rose.

"I can see in the dark," Rhoyd said.

"So ye can," Conor agreed, taking the lad's hand and starting for the trail, "But I'm not so blessed ..."

They had come to the head of the path, when Rhoyd gasped and froze.

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

Conor reached for his sword. An unearthly stillness began to fill the air that felt like a breeze brushing the small hairs of his arms. The mercenary looked down the path and saw a black shadow running up the rise. The hoarse pants of an animal in the throes of exertion filled his ears. Conor seized Rhoyd and quickly backed towards the safety of the fallen stones littering the mound. The *sching* of drawing steel whispered through the twilight. Conor braced himself for what was about to come.

A black stag with eyes of fire exploded into view. For a brief moment, it paused, sides heaving like bellows, before it shook the blood-hued rack and rushed at the man and the boy. Conor quickly hauled Rhoyd into the protection of the fallen menhirs, hoping they would provide a haven to keep the beast at bay. He could feel the rush of ancient magic swelling around the stag, not unlike some of the power he had experienced serving alongside mageborn on the battlefields of the Last War.

"Get down!" he snapped at Rhoyd as the beast charged, and the lad quickly obeyed. Conor turned with a shout, lashing at the stag with his sword. He managed to graze the beast's shoulder. Where steel touched flesh, it hissed like spittle on hot stones, filling the air with the stench of burnt hide and hair. The creature shrieked and shied back from the mercenary.

"Hout Awa! Unseelie!" he hissed through gritted teeth and slashed again, determined to keep the beast from the mageborn lad.

The stag circled them, bugling a challenge and shaking its rack. Conor could see the red eyes were roving towards Rhoyd with a flare of keen interest. *No*, he thought. It knew what the lad was! Mageborn essence was always an irresistible lure to such a fiend, and the Unseelie could gain much power from stealing the life of such a lad.

Not while I have life in me! Conor thought, and with a shout, he charged the stag, swinging steel once more. The Unseelie turned as though bolting, only to lash out with both its hind hooves. Conor was forced to dodge, knowing those flinty hooves could cut like daggers. Awkwardly, he lashed out again, hoping to hamstring the monster, but the stag leaped out of range, dashing a wide berth around the man — a move that, to Conor's horror, allowed the creature to get into the nest of menhirs where the cornered lad crouched.

"Rhoyd!" Conor shouted.

"Siaghead buail!" he heard the lad cry in response and saw the blue flash of a magic arrowbolt leap from the lad's outstretched hand to strike the Unseelie. It bellowed and leaped back, then prepared to charge at the boy again.

Conor shouted and tried to fling himself over the fallen stones at the stag when he heard another man's cry of feral rage filling the air. A steel arrow on a rowan shaft flashed past Conor, nearly clipping him. It struck the black stag in the heart, and dropped the great beast where it stood.

Conor turned and found a braw man in hunter's trappings carrying a longbow and standing at the head of the path. Twigs and leaves matted his fiery hair, and his face under the beard was twisted into a mask of insane rage. The corded muscles of his arms, neck and legs bulged from continual exertion. He wore a ragged plaid, kilted in the old style and woven in the tartan of the MacRoes. But his eyes were what struck Conor with cold uncertainty. They glowed white with fey power that crackled the very air around the man.

Slowly, the hunter lowered his longbow, his face softening. Conor felt impelled to glance back towards the fallen stag. A woman of unearthly pale beauty was stepping away from the carcass; looking confused.

"Fiona," the hunter said and quickly crossed the ground to meet her, passing Conor as though he were not present at all. The hunter reached out to take the woman in his arms but before he could touch her, she dissipated like smoke on the wind. He sighed, glowing eyes growing luminous.

"Father," he said, shaking his head. "I am ready to join you in the Summerland now."

At those words, the earth beneath them began to tremble, and towards the center of the fallen stones, a crack opened in the very ground, throwing forth brilliant light that forced Conor to shade his eyes. Rhoyd gave a startled cry, scrambling over the stones, reaching desperately for Conor. The mercenary was forced to kneel to keep from falling. He snagged the lad in a free arm, hauling him close, and watched as the hunter once known as Malcolm MacRoe descended into the light. Then the ground shut like a great mouth, and the trembling of the world ceased.

For moments, all Conor could do was clutch the lad to him and stare. The stag's mighty carcass crumbled to dust and was swept away by the wind that rose to tug the mercenary's hair and plaidie. Then all was as before, a calm world bathed in twilight shadows. He could barely make out stars peeping down from the indigo sky. The sliver of a waxing crescent moon on the western horizon smiled at him.

"Horns," Conor muttered under a weary sigh.

A small head rose, blue eyes wide. "Was that him?" Rhoyd asked. "Was that the hunter you spoke of, Malcolm MacRoe?"

"Aye, lad," Conor said. "I do believe it was, and you and I have just witnessed the true and final ending to his sad tale."

Slowly, Conor pulled himself up onto feet that felt like lumps of clay and legs unsteady with weariness ... not that he would ever let the lad know. Instead, he placed himself next to the stones and looked at Rhoyd.

"Come on, lad, hop up and I'll give ye a ride," Conor said. "We'd best get back down to camp, or Eithne will likely give our share of the meal to auld Battlebrute."

Rhoyd eagerly scrambled onto Conor's back, clutching with gangly thin limbs as the mercenary started for the path. Conor cast a last wary glance over one shoulder at the barrow mound and its tumbled stones.

"That was so strange," Rhoyd whispered, and Conor smirked to hear the awe that resounded through the lad's voice. "Do you know any other stories like that one?"

"Another time, perhaps, lad," Conor said, shaking his head. "You'll ne'er catch me telling auld tales atop a seelie mound again. We've had more than enough adventure for one night."

Rhoyd giggled as Conor cautiously picked his way down the path towards the faint distant glow of a campfire and the scent of Eithne's rabbit stew wafting on the breeze.

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Laura J. Underwood's short stories that have appeared in *Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine, Adventures of Sword & Sorcery, Of Unicorns and Space Stations* and many others.

Michael Kucharski is an illustrator & graphic designer who lives in Detroit, MI. He has been illustrating for over ten years.

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A Quilter's Magic

by Karen Magon

Beatrice knew there was something wrong with her quilts. She'd magicked in warmth and sweet dreams, and she'd worked each one carefully, patterning in lovely secrets. But no matter how pleased people were when they bought them, they were still returned.

Beatrice prepared to go into her latest quilt, trying to get comfortable on her chair, the quilt spread over her lap, most of it bunched around her feet. Her mouth felt full of wool as she set the spell so she could find her way out of the quilt when she finished.

She felt so frustrated she thought she might choke. She knew the magic she had sewn into the quilt was exactly as it should be. She knew she would find nothing wrong when she explored it; there was never anything wrong with her quilts.

She smelled sea water and jumped, the quilt falling, her chair clattering as a kelpie exploded into her workroom.

A horse of mist and sea foam, the kelpie reared. "You'll drown," it squealed, its hooves thudding on the floor, its head striking towards her, splattering her with water. "Be warned that it will happen. But first," it added, "I'll take your magics so that you might drown with relief. It's a kindness. Think nothing of it."

Beatrice scuttled, but there was no escaping the pull she felt, a tug from deep inside herself. She frantically gathered protection wards, but magic flowed through gaps. She could see streams of her magic sucked into the kelpie's nostrils, and she felt as if the most important part of her was being taken.

"So tasty," it said, its yellow eyes golden in its long bone-colored face.

"Why are you attacking me?" Beatrice gasped.

"You waste your dream magic on trifles," mocked the kelpie. "Pah!" it snorted. "I could make much better use of such a talent."

Beatrice stiffened. How dare this — this thing judge her like that. She reached for the quilt on the floor, and despaired when she couldn't feel the magic in it, when she realized how far the kelpie had already crippled her. She threw the quilt, shouting words she would have used to explore its workings.

The kelpie paused, distracted by the quilt on its crest, draping over its shoulders. "You would stop me with a blanket?"

Beatrice chanted the spell even louder, though it seemed hopeless.

Except — except the kelpie was becoming more condensed, tendrils of water and mist dissolving into the quilt until she could barely see the outlines of a horse. The kelpie squealed as it tried to shake it off, shrinking until there was nothing left but the quilt lying in a sodden heap.

Beatrice almost fainted as her magic flooded back into her, and she felt bloated and sick even as she welcomed its return. Gingerly, she picked up the quilt, her fingers shaking. One of the names for this quilt pattern was Winding Ways. Between that and her spell, she doubted the kelpie would ever find its way out.

She looked around her shop. Sea water

Artwork by Katy Winters

puddled on the floor
and dripped from fabrics. She should have warded against floods, but who would have thought she'd need something like that?

She had most of the water mopped up, her fabrics drying on the line outside, when the door to her shop crashed open. "It smells like a fishery in here," boomed the woman striding in, throwing the quilt she carried onto the counter. "I've come to return this," she said.

Beatrice shakily rose to her feet, so tired she wasn't sure she could stand. She'd sold the quilt to Holta the Huge only a week earlier.

"Why?" asked Beatrice. Before, Holta had intimidated her, but she was too tired for any of that. She felt a strange sense of confidence, as if when her magic had returned, it had taken something from the kelpie. Horrifying thought, and Beatrice pushed it away.

"Why are you returning the quilt?"

"There's something wrong with it."

"What's wrong?" probed Beatrice. "I made it so you would be warm, so you would have pleasant dreams, and wake refreshed."

"I wake up not feeling like myself." Holta slammed her fist down on the counter. "Why, just this morning, instead of bashing him on the head, I smiled at the cursed baker when he told me I should get a husband."

Beatrice regarded the woman pacing her store; knew her reputation for destroying ale houses, for facing down swordsmen. No, she would not welcome a quilt of sweet dreams, no matter how pretty they were.

She went to a cupboard and lifted down a quilt. "Here," she said slowly. "I think you will find this more to your liking. One of the pattern names," she added, "is Wheels of Mystery. I don't think you will be disappointed."

Holta tilted her head, admiring how the wheels intersected with each other, almost spinning with light and dark colors. "Okay," she said. "I'll give it a try." She smiled a gap-toothed smile and took the quilt.

Beatrice sighed as she watched the quilt leave. Between Wheels of Mystery and Winding Ways, the quilt would surely give both the kelpie and the giantess the sort of dreams they seemed to want.

Maybe that was the problem. She'd quilted in nothing but happiness, ignoring that dreams had a darker side.

Her fingers tingled with magic as she picked up the tiny quilting needle. She didn't realize how golden her eyes glowed as she worked, mixing in thorns and stings among the bouquets and butterflies.

❄

Karen Magon works part-time in an elementary school and writes a small monthly newsletter for her neighborhood association. She has been seriously submitting for almost a year, and this is her first sale.

Katy Winters is a freelance illustrator and product designer.

Artwork by Katy Winters

An Interview with Guy Gavriel Kay

by Charlene Brusso

Guy Gavriel Kay is the author of quite a few acclaimed fantasy novels, including the groundbreaking "The Fionavar Tapestry" trilogy. His most recent book is ***LORD OF EMPERORS****, sequel to* ***SAILING TO SARANTIUM*** *and concluding book in "The Sarantine Mosaic" series. He was born November 7, 1954, in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, Canada, and currently lives in Toronto.*

MZBFM: *Moving from Saskatchewan to Ontario must've been a bit of a change for you, climate and population-wise. How old were you when you made the move?*

GGK: It wasn't quite like that — less of a story. I was born in Weyburn but have no memory of it at all. Moved to Winnipeg when I was three and grew up there until leaving for Toronto to go to Law School after the year in Oxford.

I've read generalizations that would have readers believe Canadians write with a noticeably different focus compared to authors in other countries. Do you think your background adds a different "flavor" to your writing in terms of the themes and issues you explore?

I don't buy into the "national identity" schemata for fiction. Too easy and glib, most of the time. Of course there are common threads that can emerge, but they can show up across borders or be shaped by one's friends and peers — and today these need not be located in the same city or even country. I'm inherently suspicious of all categories and labels and that includes discussions of a "Canadian voice" or a "British voice".

You've been a full-time fantasy author for a while now, but that's not exactly what you set out to do in life at first, is it?

No. I trained as a lawyer, but never practiced. I also spent many years as Principal Writer and Associate Producer for a docudrama series in Canada called *The Scales of Justice*. (That ended years ago. We dramatized famous criminal trials.)

Writing courtroom docudramas sounds very different from writing fantasy — and yet, I can see how dramatizing those "real world events" might not have been quite so different from using history as a springboard for fantasy .... Did writing for TV teach you any skills that are helpful in writing fantasy?

Not especially. Legal training was helpful, in two ways that seem obvious to me, looking back. One is the way in which one has to learn to marshal large amounts of information in preparing for a trial (my training was in criminal law). Pulling together a large-scale novel demands some of the same ability to keep all the balls in the air at once.

The other (somewhat linked) is the way in which trial preparation forces one to become an "instant expert" in some very specialized areas. Learning enough about, say, ballistics to be able to cross-examine a ballistics expert isn't much different from learning enough about mosaic or chariot racing to be able to work with these motifs. You learn how to get a grounding quickly, and where to go to learn more.

Along with everything else on your resumé, you also have the distinction of helping Christopher Tolkien edit ***THE SILMARILLION*** *from J.R.R. Tolkien's notes. I'll bet that's an opportunity a lot of writers would've gladly sacrificed a year of their lives for. How did you happen to get the job?*

My parents were very good friends with the parents of Christopher Tolkien's second wife, who is also Canadian. He and I met a couple of times while they were visiting her family in Canada and on the third occasion, after his father had died, he invited me to come to Oxford to assist him. As much as anything else the invitation grew out of his perception that the editing would be essentially a "scholarly" exercise and the model in his mind, I suspect, was that of the academic and his graduate student assistant. The actual process turned out to be radically otherwise, but that's a long, other tale.

Were you a big Tolkien fan before that point, or did it start out

PHoto: Beth Gwinn

as just a "good opportunity"?

No, I was very much a fan, and had already "branched out" to other early fantasists by then ... Eddison, Cabell, Dunsany, Peake.

One of the things that always amazes me is how far your work has come from the dark Tolkien-esque mood of "The Fionavar Tapestry". As a fantasy writer you've grown from the very roots of the field (well, as far as "modern" fantasy is said to begin with Tolkien) to create a body of work that's entirely your own — even though it would've been easy just to stay in "epic fantasy quest" mode. How did you manage to make that creative leap which seems to have evaded so many other fantasy writers?

There's an enormous question in there and one that is truly hard for a writer to answer about himself. I suppose I can say, simply, that I have a horror of repeating myself and that made it easier to reject pressures to write "volume four" of a trilogy. I also have a very high sense of the "capacity" of fantasy, the importance it can have as a form of literature, not being merely a "beach read" escape. I came at the genre as a form of literature, not by way of fandom, and I think that may have affected my perceptions, for myself and the genre. "Fionavar" was intended as my "take" on the traditional High Fantasy with certain elements added, and when it was done I really did want to find another part of the forest, as it were. **TIGANA**, with its themes of culture and language and identity offered me that move towards history and "human-scaled" conflict.

Were you ever tempted to stick with (or go back to) the "epic quest"-style story that's paying the bills for so many other writers?

Not really, but I'm lucky to be able to say that, since the more historical books have always done at least as well as "Fionavar". There's no question one can "lose" some readers, who want you to do again what you did before, when one changes ground, but there's a good chance of gaining new ones, too.

*Was **THE SUMMER TREE** your first published work? (Not counting publishing credits for **THE SILMARILLION**.)*

Yes, it was. I'd written a mainstream, coming-of-age novel about backpackers in Europe in the 1970s before (written the first time I lived in Greece). It was generously received by all the publishers who saw it but my agent had no offers, only strong indicators they wanted to see the next thing I did — which was **THE SUMMER TREE**.

*What kind of response did you expect from readers when **THE SUMMER TREE** first appeared?*

Truly didn't even enter my head to speculate. What was even more enormously gratifying was the response from writers when it first came out. I happily surprised by the generosity and enthusiasm with which writers greeted the trilogy.

*And then **TIGANA** was published, and it was a totally different kind of story. It must've surprised a lot of people who were expecting something more like "The Fionavar Tapestry". Were you worried that readers wouldn't like or understand the new direction you'd taken?*

As I said before, I knew it was a departure and yes, I did worry. Not so much about whether people would "follow" me in this new direction, but whether I could pull it off! **TIGANA**'s ambition makes me shake my head sometimes, even today.

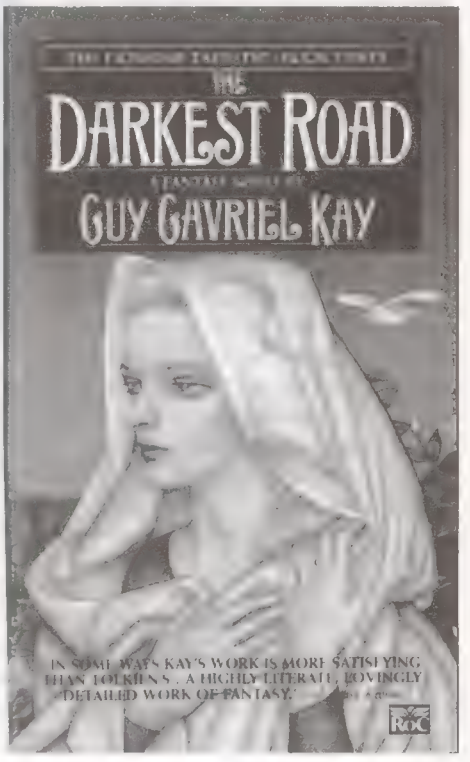
*Did you have any writers around you to ask for advice while you were working on **TIGANA**? Or are you glad no one was there to tell you "this is going to be harder than you think"?*

No, I don't work in any collegial or bounce-things-off-people fashion. When I'm done I have three or four readers whose early responses I value and I do listen closely to what they say.

Does "pulling it off" get any easier with each book, or are they too different in your mind to compare that way?

A wise friend of mine has defined the difference between craft and art by saying that a craftsman knows he can make a chair this morning because he made one yesterday. An artist does not have that assurance of precedent. So there are no guarantees that flow (for me) from having succeeded in the past. What does happen is that I have some memory and experience of the stresses and roadblocks that can emerge and that experience makes it easier to deal with them when they come (as they always do) in a new project.

*One of the really neat things about your books is that the details of everyday life — like chariot racing (and its fandom), and the art of creating mosaics in **SAILING TO SARANTIUM** — are as fresh and believable as the major thematic issues. How do you set about researching your books?*


THE DARKEST ROAD
GUY GAVRIEL KAY
IN SOME WAYS KAY'S WORK IS MORE SATISFYING THAN TOLKIEN'S. A HIGHLY LITERATE, MOVINGLY DETAILED WORK OF FANTASY.
ROC

I do believe God is in the details. One will never get it all right, and sometimes obsession with such things can slow the narrative drive of a book, but I love when I can work such small details smoothly into the story, make them part of the story. The chariots in Sarantium (and the way in which

a mosaicist figures out a race tactic because of his own craft) are a good example of something that gave me much pleasure as a writer. As for research methods, each book, indeed each research issue's different. For the chariots I ended up online, emailing various academics and even a number of present-day harness racers! There were too many contradictions in the texts.

Is travel an important part of research for you?

Travel has been important to me at times, but isn't an absolute. Actually, as much as anything else, I have found that living in the ambiance I want to recapture is the most helpful thing, and that happened in both Italy and Provence. I've written books in Greece (twice), New Zealand, Tuscany, and Provence (three times).

***TIGANA** is (sort of) set in 15th century Italy. **LIONS OF ALRASSAN** based on 12th century Spain. **SONG FOR ARBONNE** is medieval France, and **SARANTIUM** has clear parallels with the Byzantine Empire. When you're thinking about a new book, which comes first? Historical time, or geographical place?*

Good question. In fact they come together, mostly. Or they have, so far. The minor exception is **SARANTIUM**, where I knew I wanted to explore Byzantium, but wasn't sure what part of a thousand-year empire I would steer towards until I was well into my reading.

What intrigued you most about Byzantium? How did you eventually decide on a time frame for the story?

The joke (except it is true) is that over the years just about the most common adjective for describing my books has been "Byzantine" with reference to complexity and intrigue. When I finished **LIONS**, and had no idea what I was doing next, I just decided one day that I might as well find out something about Byzantium — since I seemed to have this label attached to me. I wanted to explore the images we have of Byzantine society.

A great many periods fascinated me, once I started reading. But Late Antiquity drew me for the way in which it represented a transition period, in cultural, religious, political and artistic terms. The tensions of east-west, rural-urban, old faith-new faith, aristocracy-emerging classes, church-Hippodome (and theater), rational-mystic ... all of these were vivid in this time, and the added element was — of course — the magnificent historical figures (sometime well-documented, which helps) from that period.

Have you ever any trouble with historical detail distracting you from your own storyline?

I try to avoid that since, as I said before, I see it as a chronic problem for certain writers ... the desire to flash their knowledge, at the expense of their story. One area I always wrestle with is finding plausible roles for women in historical periods. I dislike "cheating" too much and hate the sort of fantasy that gives women a broadsword. Too a-historical for me. At the same time I always believe a book is more compelling if the characters have scope and complexity, and obviously that applies to female characters as well. Jehane in **LIONS** represents about the limit of how far I'll cheat: there were female physicians at the time, some of them highly respected, so I'm anchored there, but it is almost inconceivable that one of them would have gone out with the army into the field as Jehane does, even though I have it happen on a fairly minor skirmish and under special circumstances.

That's a interesting side point — which book or setting gave you the most trouble when it came to finding interesting female roles?

I don't think there was any harder-easier issue for me. I do recall being immensely pleased when I started reading about the female physicians in medieval times ... the opportunities that afforded for the creation of Jehane were exciting.

*I've read that **TIGANA**, **A SONG FOR ARBONNE**, **LIONS OF ALRASSAN**, and the **SARANTIUM** books are all set in the same "multiverse". Was that something you intended from the start with **TIGANA**, or did it just work out that way?*

They aren't, really. **SAILING** is linked to **LIONS**, as taking place hundreds of years earlier. The analogues are the sixth century A.D. for **SAILING** (and sequel) and the eleventh century for **LIONS**. I do have glancing references (usually as songs or vague legends) in the "historical" books to Fionavar, but that was always meant as something small, a "grace note", not part of a grand scheme to "tie it all together". In fact, I think that late-in-life desire that besets many writers to create that grand linkage is a vice and undermines their work a great deal.

That's a good point — sometimes I can't help wondering if the desire is really to keep older works in print rather than to produce some synergistic link across the whole body of work. Why do you think some authors are tempted to do it?

I don't have a global theory — different people are motivated by different things. I've never considered the commercial element you mention because the examples in my own mind are substantial figures without that impetus (but you may have a point vis à vis some lesser authors). My guess is that there's a valedictory aspect to this phenomenon when it happens to an older writer: Prospero making a final unifying statement. There may sometimes also be a flagging of new inspiration and a looking back nostalgically to the days when one had ideas and energy, and trying to catch a ride on those earlier works.

The advantages to using actual historical events as a framework for fantasy are pretty obvious; have you encountered any disadvantages as well?

There's a constant knife-edge I dance on with respect to using the "real" events and angling away from them. Each book defines itself differently with respect to this. The newest one makes a specific motif of this balancing, actually. (Have a good look at the epigraph to volume two when it comes out!) There is a disadvantage for some readers, and I understand this. Some people are drawn to historical fiction precisely to get "real" facts with their fiction, the illusion they know what really happened. My approach undermines that, of course, but I happen to believe that that "illusion" should be undermined, and that fantasy is a deeply honorable (and wonderfully liberating) approach to exploring the past.

"Honorable" and "liberating" — those sound like fighting words! We've all certainly seen fantasy which was one and not the other, as well as fantasy which wasn't either. How do you go about creating fantasy which does both?

Again, no simple answer. For me, the starting point is taking both the genre and my readers seriously. I have spent my creative life assuming that people are smarter and more willing to stretch themselves than pop culture tends to regard them as being.

When do you decide to stop researching and start writing? Where does historical fact end and fiction begin? Or is the whole point to blur it so that either one seems just as likely?

As for stopping the research, it is difficult sometimes to resist what is sometimes called Graduate Student Syndrome ... the avoiding the start of one's dissertation because there's always one more book or article to chase down first! All my works are fictions, the facts are underpinnings for them, acting differently in different books (since my purposes in each will vary). They are also fantasies in invented settings, so "historical fact" is a tricky phrase to use, in any case. If I say that the "Day of the Moat" in **LIONS** is directly inspired by a "Day of the Ditch" in real-life Toledo (Spain) in the early middle ages, that doesn't make my scene any kind of historical fact.

How do you avoid sticking too close to history; alternatively, how do you manage to "file off the serial numbers" and make a historical context your own?

It very much depends on what I'm trying to do with each book. **TIGANA** really just takes an ambiance from Italy and the reality of the city-states' feuding, and how that made the peninsula easy prey for invaders. **ARBONNE** was also a deliberate attempt to change the result of the Albigensian Crusade (France invading Provence and the southwest) and open speculation as to aspects of history (and sexual politics) had that result indeed been different. **LIONS** cuts most closely to the "flow" of our history but — and this is why I love using fantasy as a form — I was able to telescope four hundred years of events into two generations. I saw the "true" story of the demise of Moorish Spain through emergence of holy warfare as acutely relevant to our own day, a way of exploring what happens to the space for interaction between peoples when ideologies harden. The two men, the two "lions" of the peninsula, actually lose their identities (we can't even "see" them in the last battle) as they become icons in a religious clash. So that book, with this very modern theme in my mind, uses the least magic, not because I was averse to magic as a tool (I'm not, at all), but because I wanted to reduce the distance between the story and today for the reader. Magic can be distancing, make it easier to dismiss a book as fantastical, less pointed towards today. **SAILING** has more magic, in part because the "feel" of Byzantium is mystic, alchemical, resonant with hints of the supernatural.

Earlier you mentioned ***TIGANA*** *allowed you to move toward more "human-scaled" conflict. Magic has been a successively smaller component in your books since — although it's actually got a slightly larger role than usual in* ***SARANTIUM****. Is that because it's difficult to make magic-wielding characters feel "human" and believable, or harder to work with a world where magic can potentially be such a wild card in the plot?*

Well, your parenthetical note anchors my response ... there's no "through line" here, no course I'm following. It will always be case-by-case for me, each book's needs determining what I do. I treat magic as a possible element, a tool, something available — and whether I use it will always be decided by the needs of the given story.

So far (except for "The Fionavar Tapestry") all of your books have been set around the Mediterranean. What intrigues you so much about the region?

I can't answer with any more precision than to say I have always been fascinated by European history. I'm not sure the Mediterranean is any unifying factor. For example, **LIONS** isn't a book about it, really; the desert is the key metaphor there.

So when you start a book, you're beginning with a setting and characters and just running with it. How did that work with ***SARANTIUM****? Which characters came first — the Sarantine intriguers who open the story, or Crispin, the iconoclastic mosaicist?*

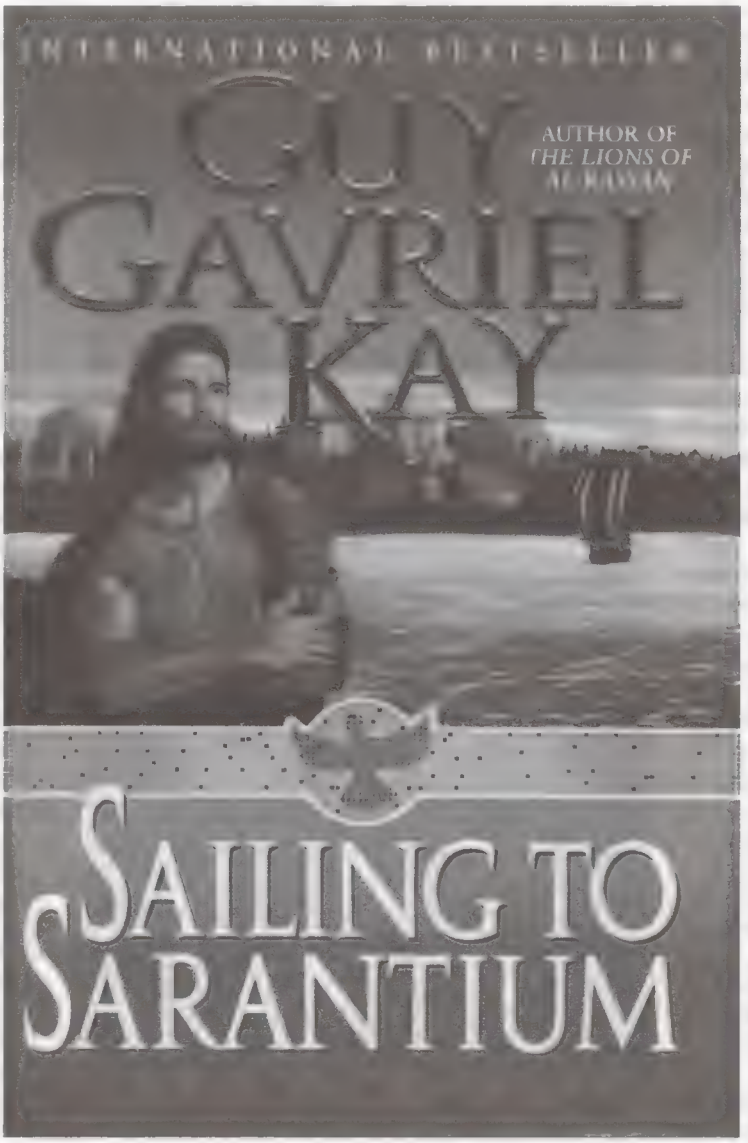
Crispin came earlier, and the notion of the journey from walls through wilderness to walls. The Prologue was an ambitious attempt to achieve two things. One was to evoke the technique of mosaic in prose. Mosaic (unlike painting, most of the time) works off juxtapositions of contrasting colors to create the illusion of a given color. I wanted the Prologue to hurl the reader into a colorful chaos, characters from all walks of life getting a few pages (or less) then giving way to someone entirely different and an entirely different

mood, and then appearing and disappearing again. A mosaic of the City.

The second goal was to establish the City itself as a "character" in a sense. The brilliant, dangerous, complex lure that Sarantium is meant to be. This was because (if you think about it) we spend the first half of the novel away from the City, going there. I wanted the reality of it in the reader's mind during that long journey.

Which authors have most influenced your writing?

Influences shift and change. There are no uniquely powerful ones. I could almost say that Vermeer, the painter, has influenced me more than most writers. When I first began writing and being published it was as a poet. Dylan Thomas and Yeats were my main influences, then the wonderful Greek poet George Seferis (whose lines are an epigraph for **TIGANA**). Tolkien introduced me to fantasy as an "adult" form. Dorothy Dunnett taught me not to be afraid of complexity. George Garrett's **DEATH OF A FOX** (a novel about Raleigh) showed me that you needn't rush your material, and if the characters are compelling enough, readers will hold with you.



I am a great admirer of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, especially **LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA**, and will always respect Stephen Donaldson for the ambition revealed in his **COVENANT** books, where he attempted to meld the modernist idea of the anti-hero with a heroic genre. Lately I've "discovered" Cormac McCarthy and am often stunned by his juxtapositions of truly brutal scenes with almost impossibly lyric prose.

Are there any authors you'd like to collaborate with?

There are many, many writers whose work I admire, but I'm not a collaborative type. The creative process is too intense and idiosyncratic for me. I've done it a few times for television, but only with one very close friend. I don't think I'd ever want to do so in fiction.

What's your writing regime like? Do you like to work out the plot of the new book completely before starting to write, or just start writing from scratch and plot as you go? Are you a fast writer?

I started off writing 6 or 7 days a week, but since having children I'm much more a five-day writer with "normal" weekends off being a father. I *never* work out the plot. The discovery process en route gives both anxiety and adrenaline. I aim for about 1000-1500 polished words a day but I revise incessantly, both as I'm going along and then very attentively when the whole draft is done. I don't send it to agents and editors until I'm awfully sure it is just about where I want it to be — one reason the books come slowly.

What fires up your imagination, inspires you? Where does your muse hail from?

Poughkeepsie? [laughs] In truth, I don't want to give a glib and can't give a really precise answer to that. I often say I write quickly but I get ideas very slowly ... and they tend to be large ones, producing large books. Obviously I'm inspired by and engaged by the whole process of exploring history through fantasy, but the actual themes of the last four books have been hugely different, which is why I can't say any single thing is what "inspires" me. I also do believe (with many other writers) that inspiration can be overrated, an excuse for not working!

When you're starting a new book, how much time do you usually spend doing research?

Never less than half a year these days, closer to a full year for **SAILING** and its sequel.

Are you fun to be around when you're in the middle of a new book?

My wife and friends could give a better answer, but on the whole I do a fairly good job of keeping the stresses of the book under wraps. I never talk about the characters or scenes, hating the idea of boring people that way, and preferring to let thoughts incubate silently rather than be nailed down by being spoken. Towards the end of a novel I'm rather more consumed by it, and can get into one of those states where I'm up several times a night making a note of something or other. My closest friends all say they know I'm working well when I seem slightly grumpy and distant over coffee, as if only "humoring" them with a visit while waiting to get back to my work. I deny this, of course.

What do you like best about being a writer?

I love the autonomy, especially the luxury I have of being able to write my books patiently and feel no real pressure to get them out quickly. I'm aware of what a gift that is. The long process, on the other hand, can be draining and in each book there have been times when it seemed to me it would never get written, I would be slogging through in some sort

of purgatorial state forever. [laughs] Obviously I hope no readers feel the same way.

If you could write in anyone else's world, fantasy or otherwise, would you?

Because of the way I work, I can't even conceptualize an answer to that!

Who are your favorite authors to read and recommend to others to read?

I've mentioned several names already, in terms of influences. I'll also urge anyone who loves fantasy to read Alan Garner ... I have long been saying that I find most adult fantasy these days increasingly juvenile, and that many allegedly juvenile books are really far more sophisticated in their use of the genre. Garner's one of the very best at this, and **THE OWL SERVICE** is his masterpiece, for me.

It's always a little surprising to me to hear how authors view their own careers. What do you consider the highlights of your career so far?

The emotional highlight is almost certainly the first acceptance letter (from England, as it happens) relayed by my agent for **THE SUMMER TREE**. The auction for **TIGANA** was hugely exciting (and rewarding) and marked a major shift in "status" for me. I'm completely unable to choose among my own books to pick a favorite or any kind of highlight in that way.

What was your darkest moment as a young writer?

No single catastrophe. The fairly predictable musings that I'd never be recognized, never actually be published ... which is why, as I said before, the first acceptance letter is probably the best moment I remember.

Did you always want to be a writer?

Yes, and a hockey player. I have just about reconciled myself to never making the NHL. Everyone retiring is younger than me.

That definitely has to be one of the differences of growing up in Canada! What position?

Right wing; I shoot right. Or center.

The loss to the NHL notwithstanding, I think it's safe to say there're a lot of readers out there who are glad you've stayed with the writing.

You just finished ***LORD OF EMPERORS*** *a few weeks ago, so this should be timely. What's your favorite way to celebrate finishing a project?*

Well, once upon a time the celebrations would be of the sort that I couldn't answer in an interview, but that's a long time ago. In truth, right now, finishing volume two of "The Sarantine Mosaic" has me caught in a crosswind of emotions. Great happiness at being done (writing is hard, having written is wonderful), along with a real sense of wistfulness, because I've lived with this story and these characters for almost five years now.

Earlier you mentioned that your books all have very different themes. In ***THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FANTASY****, editor John Clute asserts that all of your work so far has been set around themes of justice. Would you agree with that?*

I've never formulated it in those terms in my own mind ... which by no means implies that John isn't right. I'd have spoken more readily in terms of actions and their consequences, the weight of deeds, the price of power, the burdens of responsibility. I'm also very much involved in trying to explore the ambiguities in human affairs ... the complexity of such things.

With "The Sarantine Mosaic" wrapped up, what project(s) are you currently planning or working on? — Or is it 'way too soon to even think about that yet?

Aie! After five years enmeshed in this?? Bite your tongue! Um, yes, a bit too early to speculate! I never know the next book while writing one.

Thank you.

❄

Guy Gavriel Kay Bibliography:

"The Fionavar Tapestry":
THE SUMMER TREE (1985)
THE WANDERING FIRE (1986)
THE DARKEST ROAD (1986)

TIGANA (1990)
A SONG FOR ARBONNE (1992)
THE LIONS OF AL-RASSAN (1995)

"The Sarantine Mosaic":
SAILING TO SARANTIUM (1999)
LORD OF EMPERORS (spring 2000, forthcoming)

Artwork by Vincent Di Fate

Ploughman's Son

by Kurt R. A. Giambastiani

A raven danced before the rickety door when Alain reined in at the tiny cottage. The bird did not fly away but simply danced — black and ragged — like a mad mourner at a pauper's grave. It turned its head and showed one eye to the dark youth on his huge horse. The eye flickered from onyx to moonstone and back.

"Begone from this place," the raven said. The voice was gravelly, but the words were clear. "I'll have nothing to do with you, demon child."

Alain snuffed at the dust raised by his horse's hooves. "Hush," he told the bird. "I cannot speak with you when you are like this. Tell me, do you know me?"

"Surely I do. You are the child of evil. I can see you plain. Go away from this place. I do not want y'here."

Alain's laugh was short and bitter. "You never did," he said from atop his draft horse. The horse pawed the stony hillside with a feathered foot and blew a breath from massive lungs, misting the evening air. The raven capered and twirled twice before it stopped and showed Alain its other eye.

"Excrescent one! Filth! Bastard! Go away!"

Leather reins creaked in Alain's grip and muscles bunched along his forearm.

"Hush," he said through angry teeth.

"Bastard child," the raven taunted.

Alain swung his leg over the horse's broad back and dropped to the ground. With one hand he unhooked the cocked crossbow he'd brought and with the other he slapped a bolt in the groove. Three steps took him around the tall beast that had borne him up the mountainside. The raven saw the crossbow and spread its wings. It leapt into the air as the crossbow sang. The bolt struck the bird mid-body, passed through and thrilled to rest in the doorway timber.

As the raven fell to the ground, Alain heard it call his name. The voice was less gravelly, more feminine, and carried with it to earth the distinct sound of surprise. A sigh rose and fell in Alain's breast and his lips curled downward in a tight frown. He recocked the crossbow and walked over to the twitching, bleeding collection of feathers and shadow. The upturned eye flickered from night to day, to night, to day, slower and slower each time.

"Go away," came the faint, faint voice.

"No, Mother," Alain said as he laid in a second bolt. "I will not go away." He pointed the weapon down at the struggling raven, brought the tip of the bolt up close to the eye with its milky inner eyelid now caught somewhere between moonlight and deep, black night.

"Not this time."

The bolt thudded home.

"Down a bit more, Reynald." Alain tugged again on the reins and the horse grudgingly lowered its head. He grasped the horse's bridle and pulled the great head lower. "There. Hold there."

He tried to keep Reynald still, the horse's scent of dust and sweat strong in Alain's nostrils. He checked the fastenings that held the pounded iron plates over Reynald's forehead and temples. One was loose and Alain made to tie it back down, but found his hands were still shaking from the encounter with the raven. He swore under his breath and bit his lip, concentrating on his task.

"There," he said when the plate was once more secure. He released the bridle and patted Reynald's neck. "I wouldn't want that witch to get her claws on you, old friend." Reynald whickered down into Alain's hair and the youth gave a small nervous smile. "Best I had let her keep the bird, you think, eh?" He looked back at the cottage and the surrounding wood. "Yes. It wasn't the smartest thing to do. Too late now, I'm afraid. She'll be looking for something new by this time."

Picking up the trailing reins, he led Reynald to a tree that had a few tufts of grass at its heavy roots. He tied the horse loosely. From off the horse's back Alain pulled the crossbow and the leather panniers that held his meager provisions. He turned toward the cottage.

The raven still lay before the door, a mangled bloody testament to his self-indulgent rage. The smell of blood was thick in the still, cooling air. Alain cursed his temper and kicked the corpse aside. He lifted the loop of frayed hemp that held closed the door. The door scraped across the packed earthen floor as he pushed it open.

"I'm here to send you on, Mother," he said to the shadowy interior. "D'ye hear me? I've come to lead you over."

The answer blasted through his mind, hot and vicious, laced with hate. He saw the hunched and rag-draped form that had been his mother, leaves still stuck in her wiry grey hair from a nap she'd taken with her woodland spirits. She turned from the ovenlike hearth, the hot knife smoking in her hand. Her face was split by a brown-toothed grin but at the corners of her eyes he saw lines of agony. Tears streaked down her dusty cheeks. Alain felt again the hemp cutting into his wrists and ankles and he felt the heat of the fire-purged blade as it neared the pristine skin of his chest and he heard his voice — so young, he thought, so young — saying "Mama, Mama, Mama," like the prayer of a dying man.

He returned from the vision to find himself curled up on the threshold, sweat cold on the back of his neck and fire running through the traceries that adorned his breast.

Payment for the raven, boy.

Alain sat up and looked into the darkness of the cottage. The hearth was cold in the center of the one room. He rose to his feet, one hand touching the decade-old scars that laced his chest. His breath grew short.

"I was a *child!*" The words were swallowed by the forest as if he had never spoken.

Child of Evil, Child of Pain, was the response.

As if that is an answer, he thought as he stepped beyond the threshold into the home of his early youth.

He turned about the door and made to drop his leather satchels in the corner between the door and the wall, to sit down in the place that for years had been his. He stopped, retreating from the spot.

Go ahead, boy. Welcome home.

Alain turned and stepped instead to the willow-wood cot that had been his mother's until a fortnight before.

Ah, came her wheezing thought. *Even*

Artwork by Vincent Di Fate

better. Visions of cracked lips, bony limbs, and sagging breasts lashed through his mind. Repulsed, frantic, he fell back away, turned again. There was no spot, no clear place not contaminated by his memories or by the ravings of his mother's madness.

With a strong arm he overturned the low table that still held a collection of herbs and stones and feathers. He sent items flying across the room and the table crashed against the wall. He settled in that neutral spot where the table had been, and winced at her spectral laughter, the scent of her scattered herbs strong in the closed air.

What do y'want, boy?

"I couldn't say," he told her sharply, arms on his knees and black locks falling to cover his eyes. "I should have let them come and burn you out."

Ah, sweet one, and why didn't you?

Alain shook his head, shying away from the answer. He just sat, staring at the ground between his feet, seeing the bits of straw on the ground, the floating motes of dust in the last bars of sunlight, a long-legged spider silently tiptoeing towards the clay hearth.

Is that all that is left? he wondered, looking at the hearth. Is that all that remains of the woman who struck me so deep with terror for so many years? He remembered Radec and the villagers, gathered that morning at his father's field.

Radec had stood at the edge of the field, a great bear of a man with a nose famous for the number of times it had been broken in brawls. He walked along just beyond the ploughman's furrows, fearful eyes wide beneath a wrinkled brow. Half the village stood silent at the gate behind him, afraid even to step on the land tilled by the man who had once slept with the Delphine of Dead Ox Wood.

"You must go up," Radec had said, had pleaded, but Alain's father only clucked his tongue and squinted into the early light as he turned his drays for another pass. "Haven't you felt her presence?" the big man went on. "She's been sending every night since: dreams, terrible dreams. Hector's girl's fair ill with their evil, and last night Faustin's Amelie lost her unborn babe."

Alain was following behind his father, busting clods and cleaning the furrow line of stray stones. He stopped and looked at the crowd at the gate. He could see Faustin's lean face, pale amongst the others.

Alain's father pulled rein on his horses and brought a kerchief to wipe the sheen from his brow.

"Erol," Radec begged. "You must go up."

Alain's father looked at the blue morning sky, at Alain, and then at the long, brooding line that was Dead Ox Wood.

"No," Erol said at last. "I'll not go up." There was a murmur from the villagers.

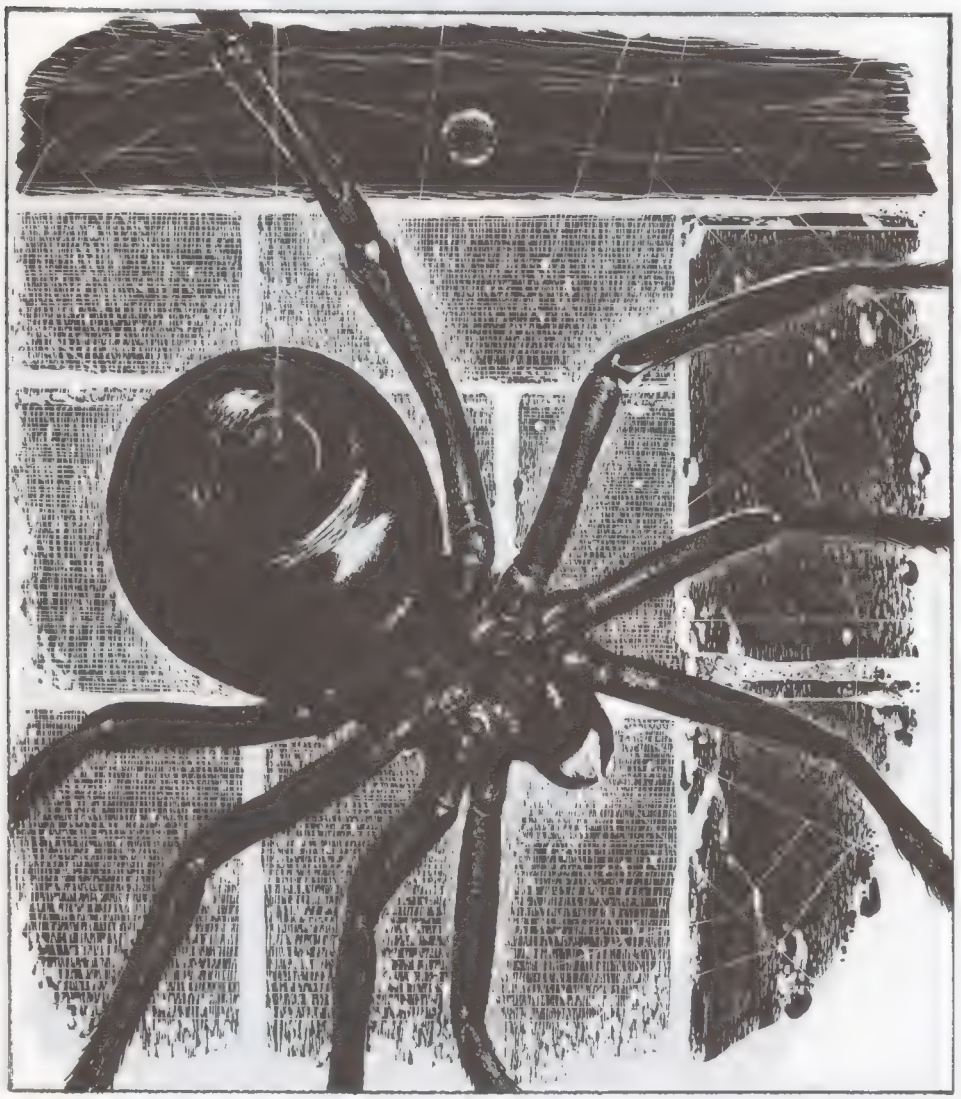
"Then we'll go up and burn her out!" cried a voice. Alain did not have to see to know that it was Faustin who spoke so. Nor did it matter, he thought, judging by the number of voices raised to second Faustin's threat.

"I'll not go up!" The horses jumped at Erol's shout, tack and harness jingling in the sudden silence. Alain looked down at the dirt at his feet, at the clean lines that were his father's trademark, pulling back and forth across the field, straight and even. "Besides," he heard his father say. "She would never listen to me."

"You leave us no choice," Radec said.

"Surely, I do!" Erol took a step as he spoke, then another. "I know exactly the kind of sendings she's been casting down from that place. I've had the dreams as well! Evil things. Foul. I've not slept for days for fear of their coming. But go up there and burn out the heart of her cottage, and you'll do nothing!" He stepped again and again, destroying the furrows as he closed on Radec. "All you will do is keep her from finding her way. You'll make her madness greater than ever it was in life. And *then* let us see what manner of sendings come our way!" Erol and Radec were a hand's breadth apart. A trampled line of strewn earth made a path from the plough to the edge of the field.

Radec was the first to lower his gaze. He took a step backward. "My Betina's with child," he said, so softly that Alain



Artwork by Vincent Di Fate

could barely catch the words. Erol put his head in his hands and Alain saw his father's chest heave with a shuddered breath.

"Let me go up," Alain said. His father looked at him, as did Radec.

"You?" was his father's question. "You?"

Alain understood the question, understood the true question behind the words. But he did not know the answer to the question, or believed he did not, so he only answered his father's words, nodding.

"Yes. Me."

Night stole through Dead Ox Wood on fox's feet, bringing a chill that crept up from the stony ground and into Alain's limbs. For an hour he sat, staring at the hearth in the fading light, the only sounds his own breathing, the jingled step of Reynald outside the cottage door, and the jeering call of a jackdaw through the shrouded trees.

The clay hearth, nearly black with age and use, lay cold in the center of the room. The fire bed was dark and sunken, the short chimney looked coldly up at the rafters. Twigs and branches lay bundled near the head of the cot, and there was tinder in plenty about the room, but Alain dared not start a fire in that ancient hearth.

It had been hers. "The heart of her cottage," Erol had called it, and Alain knew it to be true. He had never known his mother to stray far from her hovel. She never traveled to the village to trade. She preferred instead to let the steep mountainside weed out the curious and uncertain from the lovelorn, the jealous, and the sickly who came to her for magicks and wards. The hearth was her heart, and Alain had never known it to be cold in all the days of his life. He closed his eyes and thought back to the last time he'd seen it lit.

He'd come up the mountain with supplies, her payment from the village folk. He came upon her in the middle of an incantation. A flat stone lay atop the hearth and in her hand was a cup of tiny leaves from a glynnet bush, fresh-picked and soaked in wine. With the tip of her knife she placed them on the heated stone. The leaves smoked and flamed as she set them down, burning the geometries of her magic into the surface of the stone. Alain had seen this spell many times. The stone would retain her magic, and when placed beneath a bed, would bring potency back to a failing husband.

Artwork by Vincent Di Fate

When Alain's shadow crossed the threshold and fell into the room, she had looked up from her task. The woman he saw there was no longer his mother. In her eyes he saw no flash of recognition, no spark of human intelligence. Her madness had taken her wits, leaving the wide-eyed stare of the frightened beast.

She lunged at him, her body all sticks and ropes held tight by mottled skin. "Go away, demon!" she roared from between blackened gums. She leapt, knife outstretched. Without a thought his hand brought up his walking stick and just as fast he crashed it across her hideous face.

She fell and Alain heard the crack of bone as she hit first the stony floor and then the hardened hearth.

He'd fled, then, hiding from his deed in the darkest places of Dead Ox Wood, only to return a while later to bury her body. He put her beneath a cairn of stones before going home to tell his father all that had happened.

Sitting there now before the cold and empty hearth, Alain did not wonder at Erol's surprise as his son had volunteered to go up to the wood once more. The morning's question echoed through Alain's memory.

You?

One word. So many questions.

Alain opened his eyes. The cottage was dark. The moon had not yet risen to a point above the trees and all was black. He wished for his mother's talents for casting as he rummaged in his satchels. He found a candle and some tinder. Scraping flint to the dried grass, he made a flame and brought the candle to it. He set the candle on the floor and looked up to find a mouse perched neatly atop the hearth.

"Is that you?"

"Yes," it said with more thought than voice.

"Are you better, then? Do you know

who I am?"

"Why are y'here, my bastard boy?"

Alain thought about her question. "To send you over," he said.

The mouse ceased cleaning its face and looked at Alain with cabochon eyes.

"But why?"

He knew where she was trying to lead him. Down the levels of cause and effect as she'd taught him, parroting back at him his own eternal curiosity.

"I didn't want them to burn you out."

"Why?" came the question again.

I know what you want, he said to himself. Forgiveness. Acceptance. I don't know if I can give you that. He took a deep breath.

"Because," he said, "I feel guilty for killing you. Because beneath it all, I can't say I do not love you." There, he thought. That's the closest I can come to it.

"Y'stupid, worthless bastard," the mouse said. "I've wasted my time, my whole life." It shook its tiny head side to side. "And after all I've given you."

"What?" Alain noticed only in passing her rejection of his answer. What he did hear, ringing in his ears, were her last two words.

"Given me?" His voice rose in pitch, then in volume. "*Given* me!" Memories flashed past his inner vision, images crisp and tortured. Hot blades seared his chest and back, drawing raven wings and creeping vines in his tender flesh. Horsehairs were laid in open wounds, raising welted scars. Sticks descended through moonlight, bringing stars to his sight and thumping pain. Long-nailed hands groped in his breeches. Mad, wild eyes glared as spittle-flecked lips poured hate and anger over his youthful heart. Ropes burned wrists. Pain ran hot, then ran cold, both accompanied by a mother's kiss. Alain cried out, a long vomitous sound built of the agony within him. When he opened his eyes, the mouse lay curled in a ball at the foot of the hearth.

"Given me," Alain said. The mouse uncurled and sat panting, its sides shimmering with the rapidity of its breath. It turned with a mannerism that had been his mother's. It looked at him boldly, its tiny paws clenched before its breast. When it spoke, Alain could hear his mother's anguish, more than the creature's tiny voice could provide.

"I meant more for you!" It ran, a blur in the candlelight, leaping from hearth to floor, and disappeared through a crack in the wattle and daub.

Alain sighed. He stood and stretched out the kinks left in his muscles from so long on the cold ground. It will be a long time, he thought to himself, before I can talk her over. There's something here she still wants. Blood? Revenge? Alain shook his head. Knowing what went on within her madness was beyond him.

Reynald's whinny came a moment before the cottage crashed and jumped. Hooves as big as a man's head punched holes in the door. Alain jumped to the far side of the cottage as the huge draft horse pounded its way through the door and wall. In the dim candlelight Alain could see the pieces of iron hanging loose below Reynald's bridle, the leather thongs gnawed through by tiny teeth.

"*I meant more for you!*" came his mother's words as the horse broke through and into the room. Reynald's bulk filled the space before the hearth, and Alain saw the terror in the animal's eyes, so close to the madness of his mother.

"Reynald!" Alain shouted, trying to reach the animal beneath the possession. The horse cried out and reared, cracking timbers in the roof. Thatch and dirt fell down, and the huge, iron-shod hooves came down almost atop the hearth itself. Alain leapt forward to protect the hearth, he knew not how, but Reynald reared again and a great hoof caught Alain in the chest. Lights burst behind his vision. He landed on the remnants of the table he himself had tossed across the room. He heard his mother's words tumbling from the horse's lips, heard her insane screaming, and when he could focus he saw Reynald reared up and about to crush the hearth.

"No!" Alain shouted and called down a spell from deep within his soul, a spell he'd seen his mother cast a dozen times upon unhappy clients and once upon a drunken, ax-wielding Erol. Alain pulled forth the spell and sent it flying.

Reynald was hurled backward, out of the cottage. The backlash of force hit Alain full in the chest, knocking the wind from him. He lay there, stunned, both by the blow and by his own power. Then he heard his mother's moan.

Alain stood and limped around the untouched hearth. Beyond the cottage wall, Reynald lay on his side, the sheen of sweat bright even in the starlight. The horse's breath was labored. With a motion and a word he'd seen her use so often, he calmed the great beast. The casting came to him easily, almost naturally, surprising him.

"Alain," said the voice from Reynald. Alain walked closer.

"Leave him be," Alain said to his mother. Reynald's eye rolled light and dark, dark and light.

"Why?"

"It is time for you to cross over," Alain said, walking with her down the levels of cause and effect.

"Why?"

"You can do nothing more here."

"Why?"

"Because I won't let you. Because the hearth is mine now."

"Good boy," said the voice. And then, *Good*, came the thought.

The horse shivered and tensed, then pulled his legs beneath him and rolled to his feet. He seemed ready to run but Alain raised a hand and bid him stay.

"Calm, old friend," he said to the horse, taking the reins in hand. "It will be fine, now." Alain looked out with the vision so familiar and yet so new.

The silver moonlight glimmered through the treetops of Dead Ox Wood. The wood was empty. She was gone. Alain looked down the mountainside to the village, to his father, to Betina and her growing child. All were awake, looking with fear up toward the mountain. Alain sent them quieting thoughts.

Then he went to build a fire.

❄

KURT R. A. GIAMBASTIANI was born in the SF Bay Area and educated in Jerusalem. He now lives in Seattle. In addition to writing he plays viola, builds furniture, cooks Provençale and Greek cuisine, raises roses, and works for a living. He has had stories accepted by *Dragon*, *Talebones*, and others, and is working on his fourth novel.

VINCENT DI FATE lives in upstate New York with his wife and family. He worked in animated films before turning to freelance artwork — see our interview with him in issue 36. He received a Hugo as Best Professional Artist in 1979 as well as the Skylark, Lensman, and Chesley Awards. He is regarded as one of the world's major illustrators of futuristic themes, for clients from CBS to NASA. He recently wrote **INFINITE WORLDS: the Fantastic Visions of Science Fiction Art**. He is working on another art book and several children's books.

LETTERS

Lynn Nauman

Please find enclosed my selections for Issue 43's Cauldron. This is the first time I've participated in the Cauldron because I wanted to express how delightful your cover by Victoria and Julio Lisi is. I've been reading your magazine since issue #22, and I can only count on one hand which cover art truly has caught my attention (issues #22, #31, #39, #40 and this one). I also was quite intrigued by Barbara Davies's "The Seeds of Memory". You didn't mention if this was her first sale to MZB, but I feel I would have remembered any of her past work. I hope this is the beginning of a long relationship.

Rachel's article on submitting art work was interesting; I'm just trying to decide if computers actually make printing images any easier. I felt overwhelmed over all one has to remember when submitting art work.

Keep up the good work. I look forward to future issues.

Lynn, thanks. I'm glad you like the Lisi cover. "Seeds of Memory" was indeed Ms. Davies' first sale to us, though not her first submission. As for the artists, yes, there's a lot for them to keep track of, which is part of why I have such respect for those who work with us. — reh

Greg Koster, Fresno, CA

Glad to see that the artists are finally getting some advice in the articles. I'm not an artist, but it sparked my interest to read how the artwork gets into the magazine.

The Bisson interview left me flat. Couldn't warm up to it. I don't fault Mr. Schweitzer, but Mr. Bisson did not seem worth a profile. This surprised me, as I've always greatly enjoyed his work. But the man doesn't compare to his works. I must say the ending of the interview, with the explosion of what appeared to be computer code may have been a clever take on the Y2K troubles, but it was exasperating. Cuteness won't take the place of substance.

Here's an idea for an editorial: Are you being deluged with stories that use the Y2K idea as a gimmick? If so, they aren't making it into the magazine. Why? Logically, it would seem that the idea could generate some good stories, but it has not worked that way so far, with not all that much time left.

[Actually, we've hardly had any submissions relating to Y2K. Perhaps science fiction magazines have received some. — reh]

How about some guidance for us out here? The columns and editorials of late have had a great deal more on what you don't want to write than right ways. But why not tell us what you would like to see? I am sure that the daily onslaught of Star Bores rip-offs is enough to exasperate you. What would make you sing instead?

I renew my request for MZB's memoirs. Doesn't even have to be formal autobiography. Just reminiscing about the way it was. In her career she has undoubtedly seen a great many things come and go, or metamorph into unexpected horrors or delights. How about this?

Greg, thanks for the requests. Marion sometimes includes (as she did in her editorial for issue 44) reminiscences. She probably harps on what she doesn't want since, statistically, the editors reject about 25 stories for each one purchased. — reh

Mark Kittel, from the Internet

I have read your submission guidelines thoroughly and have one question. Your list of "things not to submit" includes "shared world stories". Can you give me a more detailed explanation of what your publication considers a shared world story? I have a story that I would like to submit, but I am not certain if it falls into this category or not, and do not want to waste your time if it in fact fits into this category. Thanks!

A shared world story is one where everybody gets together and agrees on the background for the story — Bob Asprin's "Thieves' World" is a good example. And then we all write stories about it and sometimes use each other's characters. My character Lythande started out as a shared world character in "Thieves' World", but has gone on to have its own adventures. We don't want shared world stories in the magazine because it's too much trouble to chase down the original creators and get permission. So make up your own backgrounds — it makes it simpler. — MZB

Sherry Norris, Nashville TN

I am enclosing the label from issue #44's envelope in case that helps with the address change. *[Yes, it does; thank you for including it. — reh]* Thank you for publishing such an excellent magazine. Will you have another issue coming out with all of the stories by SCA folk? I remember one in the past when almost all the biography blurbs mentioned the SCA. Thank you again.

If we've published an "all-SCA issue", it was by accident. However, it's not an accident that people who've taken the effort to think through the lifestyle of a pre-industrial culture are more likely than some others to create believable backgrounds for their fiction. — reh

David McGinley, Harrisburg, PA

I wasn't aware that the cover was part of The Cauldron ballot. Perhaps it could get separate consideration on its applicability to the story (how well the artist captured the flavor of the story) and/or the overall appeal of the artwork? As you pointed out, the cover doesn't always win. You've had a few covers that I wouldn't mind having as a poster. Would marketing posters be practical?

I agree wholeheartedly with you about keeping book stores in our neighborhoods, but the brutal truth is that economic considerations force me to favor stores that offer discounts. I simply buy too many books to do otherwise. I think any local book store would be foolish to eschew the Internet as a source of sales, though. I usually spend extra on impulse buying when I browse.

I've enjoyed the various columns of advice for writers. I've tried my hand at it, and I understand how difficult it can be. I've been accused of using archaic terms. Do you know of a dictionary that has words like geas listed? My 300,000+ word Webster is deficient in this regard. Few things make my day like finding a new word. Yes, I live a rather monastic life.

Thanks for all the work you do and the entertainment that you provide. My blessings to all.

David, while the cover is usually related to the lead story, it isn't always. As any artist who does book covers can tell you, the purpose of the cover is to get the book (in this case, the magazine)

continued on p. 61

Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine
BACK ISSUE DESCRIPTIONS

___#3 **(Winter 1989)** *The Adinkra Cloth* (a Nebula finalist!) - Mary C. Aldridge. *A Glassmaker's Courage* - M. C. Easton and Phyllis Ann Karr. Cover art by Kelly and Laura Freas. Guest editorial by Julian May.

___#14 **(Fall 1991)** *Black Ribbon* - Dawn Albright. *The Tengu's Scroll* - Dana Kramer-Rolls. *Stand By Me* - Glen and Connie Ten-Eyck. Cover art by Gail Butler. Interview with Teresa Edgerton.

___#16 **(Spring-Summer 1992)** *Never Look at a Gift Sword in the Horse's Mouth* - Jennifer Roberson. *The Death of Ranat's Pass* - Katherine Blake. Cover by Alan Gutierrez. Interview with Lois McMaster Bujold.

___#18 **(Winter 1992)** *Arakney's Web* - Jo Clayton. *The Black Tower* - Laura J. Underwood. *Queeneyes* - eluki bes shahar. Cover byNick Jainschigg.

___#20 **(Summer 1993)** *Cannibal Sorcerer* - Evangeline Walton & Bruce D. Arthurs. *Maiden, Are You Warm?* - Isabel Cole. Cover art by Ron Walotsky.

___#22 **(Winter 1993)** *Mad Evren's Dreams* - Phyllis Ann Karr. *Ladyslipper* - Lawrence Schimel. *The Demon's Lamentation* - Laura J. Underwood. Cover by Alicia Austin. Interview with Elizabeth Moon.

___#23 **(Spring 1994)** *Killer Byte* by Mercedes Lackey. *To Kill the Undead* - Marion Zimmer Bradley. *Never Doubt a Sorcerer* - John Buentello. Cover art by Vincent Di Fate. Peter Beagle interview.

___#24 **(Summer 1994)** *Ice Princess* - Elisabeth Waters. *The First Maxim* - Steven Piziks. Cover by David Cherry. Katherine Kurtz interview.

___#25 **(Fall 1994)** *The Master-painter* - Diana L. Paxson. *On the Holy Mountain* - Darrell Schweitzer. Cover by Jill Bauman. Interview with Ray Nelson.

___#26 **(Winter 1994)** – *Dinner Music* - Jo Clayton. *Fool's Fire* - Marion Zimmer Bradley. Cover by Nick Jainschigg. Interview with Jennifer Roberson.

___#27 **(Spring 1995)***Pot of Dreams* - C.J. Cherryh & Jane S. Fancher. *A Little Night Music* - Dorothy J. Heydt. Cover by David A. Cherry. Interview with Gahan Wilson.

___#28 **(Summer 1995)** *The Harder They Fall* - Tanya Huff. *The Long Divorce of Steel* - eluki bes shahar. Cover by Bob Eggleton. Interview with Diana Paxson and Adrienne Martine-Barnes.

___#29 **(Fall 1995)** *Bloodsong* - Jo Clayton. *Humphrey's Dilemma* - Cynthia McQuillin. Cover by Nicholas Jainschigg. Interview with Tanya Huff.

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Never Comment On A Likeness

by Mary Catelli

Sir David Markleton leaned back his chair. "Really," he drawled, "Lord Redberry — overreacted." He spread one hand; the gaslight glinted from the ruby in his ring.

Lady Goldfinch sat bolt upright in her chair, resolving never to accept another invitation from Lady Stepple. That woman sat at the head of the table, as smug as a cat that had eaten a canary. "Really," said Lady Goldfinch, frigidly. "I would have said he was foolishly generous."

Lady Stepple leaned forward. "Never speaking to her again, except on necessary public occasions?"

"If he divorced her," Lady Goldfinch said, "he would never have had to speak to her, ever." Sir David sat back and looked at her; Lady Goldfinch looked back with what she hoped was a suitably frosty expression.

Lady Stepple raised a hand. "Of course," she said, "your husband ..." A murmur of agreement went around the table.

Lady Goldfinch fumed. Of course Arthur would mind if she were unfaithful to him, he would have the perfect right to mind, but nothing would perturb the lords and ladies who were amused by how Lady Eastfield had given birth to a boy who exactly resembled Lord Eastfield, and how Lady Silverton raged, because Lord Eastfield was supposed to be having an affair with *her*.

"Of course, you meant it as a challenge," Sir David said. Lady Goldfinch, hating the smooth tone of his voice, looked away from him, at the reflections in the windows. "What grounds would Lord Goldfinch have for complaint? You have given him an heir, and a spare, and a third son beside."

Lady Goldfinch stiffened, not dignifying that with an answer. Even if she were to be unfaithful, she would not want this notorious gallant.

Sir David came up behind her and said, his voice low, "Alexandra." His breath brushed her hair.

Lady Goldfinch whirled around, ready to box his ears, but Sir David stepped adroitly back. "No more of this, then," he said, lightly. He tilted his head to one side, the hair falling back from his slightly pointed ear. Lady Goldfinch found herself chilled by all the stories that Sir David was a changeling.

Sir David smiled. "Let us talk of other matters." He spread one hand. "The news, perhaps. Such as the story of that poor murdered baby."

Lady Goldfinch gave him an uneasy glance. "The case last month?" she said. "The child burned to death by servants convinced it was a changeling?" She wondered if mentioning that case were a coincidence.

Sir David smiled. "That one. They are talking of having all the servants committed as insane."

Lady Goldfinch's mouth twitched. "Because they say they knew it was a changeling? How could they know it, when the baby, in fact, was not, for it did not go flying up the chimney?"

Sir David's smile deepened, unpleasantly. "Of course," he said, "the Good Folk might well have been involved — even though the baby was not a changeling."

Lady Goldfinch blinked in bewilderment.

"They are, after all, masters of glamour."

Lady Goldfinch recoiled. "'Could

make a lady seem a knight,'" she thought,

"'A nutshell seem a gilded barge
A sheeling seem a palace large
And youth seem age and age seem youth,
All was delusion, nought was truth.'"

"Even so," said Sir David, like a schoolmaster to a student who had outdone himself. Lady Goldfinch flinched, realizing she had spoken aloud. "The Good Folk might have been playing with the servants ...."

"Then," said Lady Goldfinch, her voice like flint, "they are not good." She stared at him a minute longer, resolving that if he took a step toward her, she would box his ears. When he did not, she walked to the door.

The nurserymaid hovered by the door. Lady Goldfinch looked down at her youngest son as he fretted; even by the lamplight, she could see how flushed his cheeks were. "Perhaps I should summon the doctor," she murmured. She leaned over the baby. Edward opened his eyes. Lady Goldfinch froze. Edward had had gray eyes, like Arthur's. Now, he did not, nor did he have her own blue, but dark brown. Lady Goldfinch gulped. She had seen too much of Sir David Markleton's eyes not to recognize them in her son's face.

The nurserymaid peered into the cradle with dark eyes. "I don't think any doctor's going to know how to physic *this*," Jane said, darkly. She shook her head, her gray-brown hair shifting around her face. "The Good Folk have come and gone."

Lady Goldfinch gulped and straightened. After Sir David's hinted threats, she believed that. She looked back down — at the baby, she supposed. He kicked his legs and yelled. Lady Goldfinch's mouth twisted. They did say that changelings were old — just diminutive, or enchanted. She rested her hand on the cradle. Sir David told her that story to make her doubt what had happened, she knew, but the servants had believed the child a changeling. She closed her eyes.

"They do say," said Jane, "that the best way to deal with changelings is to toss them on the fire."

"No!" Lady Goldfinch whirled around. A startled yelp came from the cradle, and Jane cringed. Lady Goldfinch drew a deep breath. "We will not. Only a month ago some servants murdered a child that way." Jane tried to meet her eyes, and Lady Goldfinch added, "Do you want to join them in jail?"

Jane shook her head, pulling back. Lady Goldfinch looked into the cradle again. "For that matter, perhaps the Good Folk have bewitched him." Her hand tightened on the wood as she considered. "There are ways of detect-

Artwork by Dennis Calero

ing changelings besides the fire, and ways of breaking fairy charms." She swallowed. "We shall try some of them."

Young Arthur and his brother Theodore raced across the lawn. Lady Goldfinch stood at the window and watched them. Behind her, the baby fussed, but she did not turn back. He was growing no worse, but he looked more like Sir David every hour. Jane was smuggling the broken eggshells of the last charm out of the nursery, and they were out of charms. She shivered. Arthur would think he knew what those looks meant, and she could not bring herself to think he would be wrong to do so.

Lady Goldfinch turned back to the cradle. The Englishwomen would doubtlessly blame her being an American for her overinvolvement in her children. She looked down at the baby. Then, those Englishwomen would send their daughters out into society with the advice to "never comment on a likeness." They would not find Sir David's pursuit so depraved — and they would never believe that the baby's looks were the Good Folk's fault, and not her own accident.

Her mouth compressed as she wished she had listened to the stories about Sir David more closely. Sir David was a changeling, Sir David got the Good Folk to help him in his amorous affairs — but the rumors could not know, she reminded herself. She swallowed. Why, she did not even know for certain that Sir David was a changeling, any more than she knew Edward had been changed.

"My lady?" a maid called up the stairs. "My lady, Sir David Markleton is here." Lady Goldfinch froze. He would make her an offer, she thought in revulsion. After a second, the servant said, "Shall I tell him you are not at home?"

"No!" Lady Goldfinch called. After a second, she added, her voice calmer, "No, I shall receive him." She started down the stairs, smoothing out her skirt with one hand. She knew what he was calling about, she thought, but she could not cringe and avoid him. Her mouth tightened. Below, she saw the butler ushering Sir David into a sitting room. The fire within burned low on the hearth; Lady Goldfinch's mouth twisted as she wished she could throw him on the fire.

She stopped in the middle of taking another step. Sir David would never admit that the Good Folk had taken Edward, and lose his bargaining chip, she thought, but he might admit some other things. A smile tugged at her mouth. She hurried down the stairs and into her husband's study.

Artwork by Dennis Calero

"Sir David," Lady Goldfinch said, her voice cool and smooth.

Sir David, from his seat beside the fire, leapt to his feet. "Lady Goldfinch." He inclined his head. "I hope your children are well?"

Lady Goldfinch stiffened a little, but managed to keep her voice calm. "I fear the Good Folk have harmed the youngest."

Sir David blinked at this forthrightness, but recovered quickly. "How distressing." He glanced at her sideways. "I could wish to help you, but what little I can do I commonly do for — dear friends of mine."

Lady Goldfinch drew a deep breath and tried to keep her heart from racing; a vain effort, when she knew this was the moment. "I doubt it," she said. "I think you are but taking advantage of their tricks for tricks of your own."

Sir David reared back, his eyes dilating with shock. "My lady!"

Lady Goldfinch raised her eyebrows. "Why would the Good Folk do anything for you?"

"Why, Lady Goldfinch, surely you have heard the rumor?"

"Do you think I am such a fool as to believe every rumor?" Lady Goldfinch took a step closer to him.

Sir David drew himself up to his full height. "This one is true," he said, regally.

"That you are a changeling?" Lady Goldfinch pressed.

Sir David nodded. "Yes."

Lady Goldfinch nodded. She pulled out the gun she had taken from the study.

Sir David blanched and took a step back.

Her mouth twitched. "I intend to treat you like a changeling: to throw you in the fire." Sir David glanced at the blaze, only inches behind him. "I doubt even your circles would accept a man who went flying up the chimney." Sir David's eyes narrowed. "Rumor is one thing." Lady Goldfinch's free hand swept the fire. "That is another."

Sir David drew himself up to his full height, but before he could speak, Lady Goldfinch cut in, "If the Good Folk have enchanted Edward, have them disenchant him. If they took him, have them bring him back and take their changeling." Sir David opened his mouth. "Now, Sir David. Or I throw you on the fire and take my chances."

The sunlight shone over the sitting room, and Edward crowed on his father's knees.

"What a fine fellow he is," said his grandmother. The dowager glanced at Lady Goldfinch. "And so like his father."

Lady Goldfinch smiled. "Very like indeed."

Lord Goldfinch chucked Edward under the chin. "These things are tricky," he said, solemnly. "Babies often change." He handed Edward back to the nanny and turned to his wife as the nanny left. "Alexandra, I have heard that Sir David Markleton has decided to break off the acquaintance."

"I'm afraid it's true, Arthur," she said, a little hesitantly, and wondered what explanation she could give. She had not thought that he might be a useful sort of fellow when she made her threats.

Lord Goldfinch smiled. "Just as well. An unscrupulous fellow."

Lady Goldfinch smiled radiantly. "I do not think we will miss him at all."

❄

Mary Catelli writes: "I live in Connecticut, where I program computers for a living and read, write, and collect rejections slips for fun. My work has appeared in *Cricket*, various **SWORD & SORCERESS** anthologies, *Tomorrow*, and *Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine*. I am currently working on short stories and a novel.

Dennis Calero has been a professional illustrator for seven years, but only now is delving into his first love: science fiction and fantasy art. Educated in Miami and New York, he has done work for *Space & Time* magazine, *Dragon*, and *Cinefantastique* as well as work for White Wolf and Marvel Comics. This is his first assignment for *Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine*. He can be reached for comment at Atomiceo@aol.com.

Don't forget to vote for your favorite authors & artists!

Use the Cauldron ballot on page 64.

Artwork by Dennis Calero

The Magic Fruit

By Bob Hill

The Master Wizard, Pierre De Brys, is a powerful and clever sorcerer. But I have to tell you, his young apprentice, Etienne De Masson, now he is perhaps more clever than even the Master himself.

Of course, I am a bit biased. After all, because of Etienne, I am probably the first and only cat in the world with the power of speech.

I guess I should explain that, shouldn't I?

Well, you see, a peculiar string of events were set in motion one day last autumn when the Master returned from the nearby town of Le Wain. When I saw him coming I decided then was a good time to show a little affection, hoping that in the sack he carried was a tasty fish or some catnip.

"Hello there, Philippe," the Master said as he stooped at the door to pet me while I slid my body in and about his bony legs. "Well, aren't you the charmer, today. But then you've always been that way when papa comes back. You think I have something for you, yes? Oh, but I'm sorry. Not this time, my kitty."

Needless to say, I was a little disappointed, but I continued to show my affections. After all, I didn't want him to think of me as selfish or ungrateful.

Just then, Etienne appeared from out of the Master's den where he had been studying. "Master, you're back! What did you bring?" The slender boy with the shock of black hair had noticed the small sack the Master carried.

"Ah, my good boy, some apples I have here." The Master stepped inside, removing his gray cloak and placing it upon the deer antler coat tree beside the door.

"Apples! Should I make us a pie, Master?" I could see the excitement on Etienne's face, although I, myself, have never had much of a taste for apple pie. Birds and fish, something with meat in it, are more to my liking.

The Master had an odd look upon his face, as though he was about to conjure some clever spell. "Er, no, Etienne. These are not for us to eat. They're quite lethal."

"Lethal?"

"Yes. They hold a spell in them that casts an eternal sleep on those foolish enough to eat them." The Master then went into the dining area, opened the cabinet, and placed the sack upon the cupboard within.

As I began rubbing myself against young Etienne's blue leggings, I noticed the apprentice's face appeared dubious regarding the Master's comment; however, he did not press the issue further.

Master Pierre said nothing more about it as well, and instead went to change out of his traveling attire and into something more comfortable.

A few days passed, over the course of which I had occasionally noticed the Master peeking in on his sack of apples, as if to ensure they were all there. I also noticed on one occasion, while the Master was busy in his den, young Etienne peering into the sack, no doubt curious.

The day after I had spied Etienne

Artwork by Bonny Carolyne Wilde

peeking into the sack, the Master went off again to a nearby hamlet to perform magic for the farmers. Master Pierre was well known throughout the kingdom as a provider of much-needed spells that would ensure a plentiful harvest.

Long after the Master had departed, Etienne went to the cupboard and pulled out the sack of apples. Looking over his shoulder and out the window, he then reached into the sack and pulled out a tattered parchment. With slender hands, Etienne unrolled the parchment and began to study the words scrawled upon it.

I jumped onto the table to peek into the sack, but I didn't get far by way of looking inside before Etienne pulled me off the table. Neither he nor the Master were fond of me being up there in the first place, not that I paid much heed to them in that regard.

"Curious as me, are you, Philippe?" He then pulled one of the tiny apples from the sack while still studying the parchment. "Well, now, let's see." He glanced down briefly at me as I meandered in and about his legs. "It says here, 'Eat the apple, and when you're through, say a wish, and it will come true'. Hmmm."

He lifted the apple up into the sunlight coming in through the window, intently gazing upon the tiny fruit. Then he looked down at me again, a smile on his face. "I knew they weren't lethal. The Master just wanted to keep them for himself."

So, with that mystery solved, I went over to my usual napping spot upon the Master's chair beside the hearth. Master Pierre often sat there in the evenings to smoke his pipe, but during the day it was mine upon which to recline.

As I stretched out upon it, I caught from the corner of my eye young Etienne biting into the apple, noting by the look on his face that it must taste quite delicious.

"Let's see now. Eat the apple, and when you're through, say a wish, and it will come true." He turned to the hearth, swallowing the last part of the apple. "Okay. I wish the stew pot would dance a jig."

The next thing I knew the large, black pot, which sat beside the hearth, began to dance upon the flagstone floor. It twirled about while its stubby, iron legs tapped and stomped across the stones.

Etienne gave out a gasp of amazement and clapped his hands. "Fantastic!"

He took out another apple, eating it quickly while he watched with amusement the stew pot dancing around the room.

Etienne finished the next apple and said, "I wish the rug to come to life."

Suddenly, the rug, which had been nothing more than the pelt of a long-dead black bear, began to crawl across the floor and then lift itself, standing upright. The pelt expanded, grew limbs, put on flesh, and became as it was in the wilderness — a menacing, gargantuan beast. Its head moved about, and the bear began growling through its reanimated jaws.

"Oh my!" Etienne jumped back a bit, no doubt surprised by the outcome of his wish. It was obvious from his reaction that this wasn't exactly what he had intended, but there it was, a great bear roaring at him ferociously.

Quickly, Etienne grabbed another apple and began eating it as the bear began to lumber across the room toward him. I have to tell you, the sight of the stew pot dancing about had been one thing, but then to have the rug turn into a bear and come lumbering across the floor, growling and grunting, raised my hackles. I hissed at the smelly thing as it passed by the chair.

Etienne swallowed the rest of the third apple. "I wish the coat tree to fight the bear."

The coat tree was made of many twisted deer antlers tied into a tall bundle. It immediately sprang to life, wrapping one of its antlers around the fire poker which was sitting beside the

Artwork by Bonny Carolyne Wilde

hearth. Quickly, it leapt into action, brandishing the poker in front of the growling bear.

I bolted from the chair and rushed over to Etienne, yowling at him. But the young apprentice had no idea what I was saying. How could he? I was a cat. The only sound that came out was, "Meow, meow!"

I wished there was some way I could tell him what to do. Why he hadn't thought of it, I'll never understand.

The bear was swinging its great claws about, dueling with the coat tree which was still brandishing the fire poker, while the stew pot danced around them both.

"Etienne, Etienne!" I kept saying, but it just came out as plaintive "meows."

The bear was quickly advancing upon us, knocking aside each thrust the coat tree made with the poker. I jumped onto the table, swatting Etienne's arm with my bared claw while he was hurriedly eating yet another apple.

"What do you want me to do, cat?" He swallowed the last bite. "I wish you could speak and tell me quickly!"

"Wish them all to return to the way they were!" I replied in a voice clearly understandable to human ears.

"Ah, of course!" Etienne pulled the bag from the table and backed up against the far wall of the dining area to avoid the approaching bear.

He reached into the bag as the bear, roaring and growling, shoved aside the coat tree. I jumped from the table and onto the dining cabinet to avoid the beast, frightened that Etienne would not be quick enough and we would both become a meal.

Etienne chewed and chewed, faster and faster, and with great gulps, he swallowed the last of the apple.

"I wish the rug and the coat tree and the pot to return to the way they were!"

Suddenly, the bear lost its monstrous flesh and claws, once more becoming nothing but a thick fur pelt before it even hit the floor in a great heaping pile. The coat tree, too, stopped in mid-thrust, resuming its proper shape as it dropped the fire poker onto the floor with a clatter. And the stew pot, which had been twirling about the dueling couple, stopped in mid-step and came to rest with a thump upon all three legs.

"That was a close call," I remarked, seeing the danger had subsided.

Etienne turned to look at me, startled and shaking. "You can say that! Good thinking, Philippe."

I did not reply, however. Instead, I began licking myself to smooth my ruffled fur. The whole incident, after all, had been rather unnerving.

Etienne reached into the sack again but pulled his hand out empty. "Now what am I to do with you? There are no more apples."

I glared at him. "What do you mean, what are you going to do with me?"

"Well, what would the Master say to having you going around talking like a man?" Then he sank against the wall in dismay. "And what am I going to do when he finds out I ate all his magical apples?"

"Well, don't look at me. This wasn't my idea. You should have thought about that beforehand. Besides, I like the idea of being able to talk. So don't get any notions about you."

Etienne scowled. "Well, I guess there can be no harm. But if the Master finds out, he'll probably fix that. That much I'm certain."

I arched my back, stretched, and then leapt from the cabinet and onto the table. "Well, we just won't let him know, now will we?"

Etienne laughed at that, but then his face turned sour again. "Still, what am I going to do about the apples?"

"I don't know, but you better think of something fast," I said, glancing out the window. "He's coming up the road now."

"Curses." Etienne quickly sprang into action, swooping up the bearskin rug and the stew pot.

He tossed the rug back onto the floor where it had originally been and set the stew pot back beside the hearth. Swiftly, he rushed over and dragged the deer antler coat tree back to its place beside the door.

As he did so, one of the antler points caught the Master's favorite rune staff,

Artwork by Bonny Carolyne Wilde

which was leaning against the wall. The staff tumbled to the floor and the crystal bauble at its very tip broke off when it slammed against the flagstones.

"Oh, great! Worse than ever now. He'll thrash me for that." Etienne picked up the staff and the broken crystal end and set them upon the table. "Now what shall I do?"

Just then, the front door began to open. Etienne, panicking, dashed from the room and into his sleeping quarters.

Master Pierre stepped inside, placing his cloak upon the coat tree. "Etienne, I have returned."

The Master walked over to the table, placing a sack of food upon it. He appeared as though he meant to call for Etienne again, but stopped when he saw the empty sack lying next to his broken staff.

I realized it was time to get out of there, and in haste I rushed under the chair to hide. The Master was not known to be of a violent temperament, but I was sure poor Etienne would get a good thrashing — that or Etienne would blame the whole thing on me.

Master Pierre went into Etienne's room. "Boy, whatever are you doing in bed? And what happened to my staff and those apples I had kept in the cabinet?"

"I'm sorry, Master. It's all my fault," Etienne replied, his tone like one who had been asleep for hours. "I accidentally broke your staff while I was cleaning. I realized how much it meant to you and so the only thing left for me to do was to end my miserable life. I ate the apples, knowing what I had done was inexcusable. And so now I am awaiting my death."

I perked up at that story. It was the most outlandish little bit of deceit I had ever heard. Apparently, I wasn't the only one who thought so.

Instead of the thrashing I expected to ensue, Master Pierre suddenly issued forth an uproarious laugh. "Okay, my boy. Very well. Very well, indeed."

He continued to laugh as he stepped out of Etienne's room and it was apparent he realized the apprentice was deceiving him. Still, he laughed rather than grow angry, amused by Etienne's ingenious tale.

"Clever boy," he whispered to himself as he reclined in his chair and took up his pipe. "I can see the student is already learning how to outsmart the Master."

And so there you have it. That is the story of how I came to hold Etienne in such high regard.

Now as for me, the Master has yet to discover my hidden ability. So don't you go saying anything to him about it. If you do, I'll have no other choice but to find more of those apples and turn you into a mouse.

And you know what cats do to mice, don't you?

❄

Robert Hill is a Texas-based writer currently working on a novel in which the characters from "The Magic Fruit" are up to their necks, once again, in misadventure. Previous occupations include paramedic, federal agent, and private investigator. Bob is a graduate of the University of Texas at San Antonio where he obtained a bachelor's degree in history. In addition to writing, Bob devotes his time assisting his wife, Mindy, in their home-based business and taking care of their four mischievous cats and a very clever African grey parrot. "The Magic Fruit" is his first sale.

Bonny Carolyne Wilde lives in New Jersey, has illustrated numerous children's books, and primarily focuses on realistic and fantastic wildlife art. This is her first appearance in our pages.

Results of the Cauldron

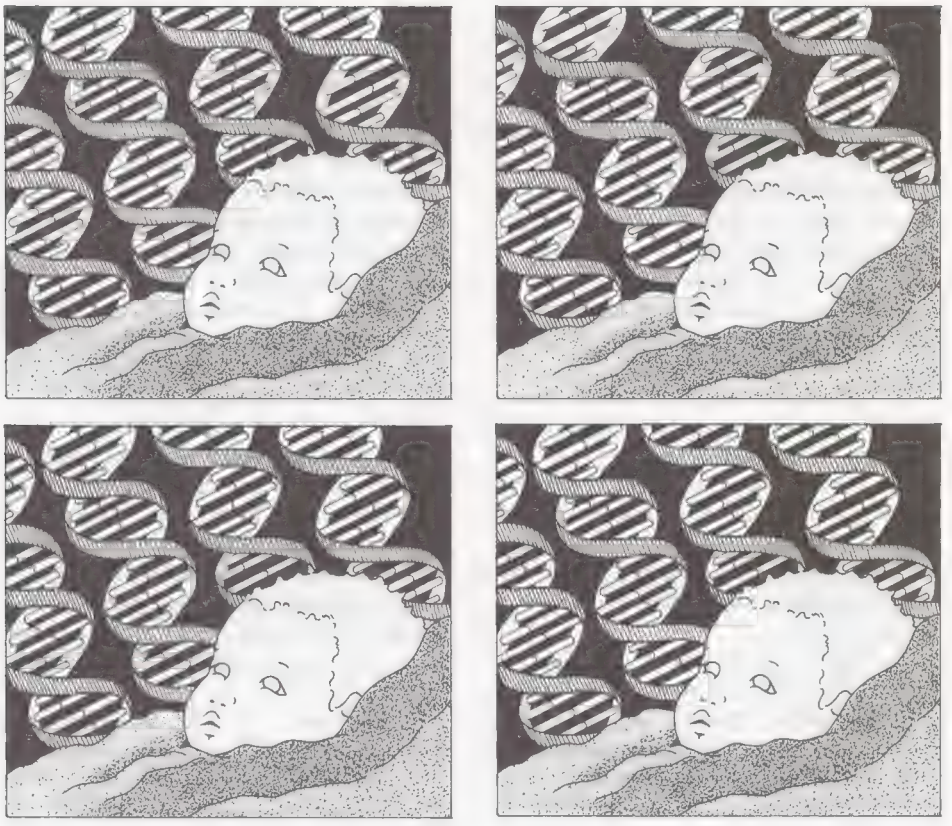
Stories:

- 1st Place: **"Mountains of Helvar" by Patricia Duffy Novak**
- 2nd Place: **"Dear Sir" by Bob Maier**
- 3rd Place: **"River's Child" by K.D. Wentworth**

Artwork:

- 1st Place: **Nicholas Jainschigg for the cover, "Wild Swan"**
- 2nd Place: **Norman Felchle for "Dear Sir"**
- 3rd Place: **George Barr for "Magic of the Lost God"**

The Cauldron ballot is on page 64 - vote for your favorites. (A photocopy is okay if you don't want to cut up your copy of the magazine; please, only one ballot per reader.)



Changeling

by Anna M. Cherry

I carefully packed just the things I would need — an extra diaper, baby bottle full of apple juice, bottle of spring water and a cereal bar for me, baby blanket, wipes, pain killers in case my hip started to hurt again. I looked into the crib. He was sitting up, one little hand on the bars, watching me. So quiet he was. Those strange eyes never left me. They were starting to show some color again since the surgery. Though the irises were still mostly yellow, they were liberally flecked with green and a little blue. I wondered if his father's eyes were green. He was starting to get some hair, too. Just wisps so far, white as cotton, but that and the hint of pink in his cheeks made him look almost normal. Except for the eyes, he looked a lot like my own James. But Tom and I both have blue eyes and our James did, too. He seems changed because he's so ill, Tom had said. But I knew it was the other way round.

I tried to smile at him. "You ready for an outing?" I whispered in my best talking-to-baby voice. He just stared at me with his wise eyes. Though he had put on weight and was filling out his skin again, his expression still put me in mind of a tiny old man. He was clutching his favorite toy — that hideously ugly stuffed troll — and he pulled it closer to him as I approached the crib. There had been no tag on that gift at the baby shower. Tom and I had laughed about no one wanting to own up to it. But little Not-James seemed to like him. He dropped the toy when I picked him up and he looked down at it and whimpered. It was the closest sound he ever made to crying.

"We can take Mr. Ugly along, too," I whispered, picking up the toy. He reached for it when I handed it to him, then tucked it up close and leaned his head on my shoulder. He knows, I thought. A little shiver scampered up my spine.

I dressed him in heavy, footed pajamas and a little hooded sweatshirt. Although it was mid-June, the night air could be cool and he had just finished a course of immuno-suppressant drugs. I had chosen the infant sling to carry him because he was still small enough to fit in it. This would also allow me to put the pack on my back and keep my hands free. I packed him up, tucking Mr. Ugly in with him, and took a last look around.

The room had always been the nursery and it looked it. The embroidered baby quilt that my grandmother had made for me hung on the wall above the changing table. The old chest of drawers that had been mine, too, stood next to the window. Tom had repainted it white with the drawer pulls done in different primary colors to match the balloons held by the teddy bears on the wallpaper. All that work, all that anticipation. And he had been such a perfect baby, too. And he still is, I told myself as I bit hard on my lip and

Artwork by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

willed my eyes to stop stinging.

I turned sharply and crossed the room to shut the window. My hip twinged where the needle had pierced it to the bone. Not-James had been unable to sleep with the window shut. That seemed fitting. I looked out over the roof of the back porch. Only starlight illuminated the yard, but I could recognize the shadows of apple trees, the shed, the raspberry patch and the fields and woods beyond. My mind skipped back to that summer so long ago when my sister was born and this had briefly been her room. I had replayed the memory so often in the recent months that it could come and go on its own.

Gram was sitting on the back porch, sipping iced tea and putting her feet up. Inside, the house was full of family and neighbors for Gwyneth's christening party. I was seven years old and not the least bit impressed with all the fuss people were making. I was jealous, too. Even then I could admit it. As a tomboy, I was always getting dirty and climbing trees. I hated to get dressed up on Sunday and could barely sit still while my mother braided my hair. Gwyneth was a second chance for Mother, and I felt it. Gram knew it, too, since she had been largely taking care of me for the last four months. She asked if I felt the need to get out of the crowd, too. I was petulant.

"Everybody's being so weird," I said, "They all act like she's so great, but she doesn't have any hair and she can't even *do* anything."

"You have a wonderful sister, Gillian. She's a beautiful, happy baby, just like you were," Gram said. "As she grows up, you'll become great friends. We must be sure to lock her window at night so the fairies don't steal her."

And I remember what I replied, "No one asked me if I wanted a stupid sister. I wish the fairies would take her."

Gram's face became very serious then. "Be careful what you wish for," was all she said.

But I was stubborn and whenever I felt particularly jealous or cross, I'd sneak into Gwyneth's room, this room, at night and open the window.

When Gwyneth took ill, I confessed this to my father who assured me there was no connection. The doctors called it "failure to thrive." She didn't gain weight; she grew light as feathers and grey as ashes. Her eyes that had been blue like sapphires faded to a green like pond scum and then to a yellow like pus. She fussed all the time, but never cried. There was no comforting her.

After her death, there was no comforting Mother. She lost interest in everything. It was all she could manage to make dinner and often that was too much. She was cross with me particularly, and I tried to stay out of her way. She would yell at me about cleaning up my room, but never cared to check that I actually did it. If I got underfoot she'd tell me to go do my homework, but she never asked if I had any. She would go to bed almost as early as I did. According to Tom, she was probably clinically depressed.

Sometimes when they thought I was asleep, I'd hear my parents arguing in the living room. One night I crept back to the top of the stairs and listened, only it was father arguing with Gram. Gram's voice was tired and urgent.

"You know the truth, Gareth," I heard her tell him. "The child who died was no child at all. It was a changeling — a thing of mists and bark, moss and brume. They'll be raising Gwyneth as a fairy child. How can you just let her go?"

"What would you have me do, Mother," I heard him say with patient irritation, "sit in the yard 'til there's a ring around the moon?"

She sighed like the last winds at the end of a storm. "When you were a child, you knew the way," she said, "It is still there. Only the child is gone."

I went back to bed and cried myself to sleep. And I dreamed the first of the dreams. In it I was stumbling through a dark wood. There were strange noises and I felt I was being pursued, but I never saw anything chasing me. When I was about to start crying in desperation, I came around a large tree into a

Artwork by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

little clearing. There sat the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She had long hair the color of the summer sunshine, she was dressed in green velvet like the dark moss on the trees, and her eyes were green as emeralds. She was singing a song that reminded me of larks by a brook. I could hear the words but not understand them. She rocked a baby in her lap. It was wrapped in a blanket the color of daffodils. It gurgled at her. She smiled back as she sang. I crept forward to get a better look, somehow knowing the baby was Gwyneth. The woman saw me and stood up. She hugged the baby to her and shook her head slowly. Then she made a sweeping gesture with her left hand and the wind came up. A swirl of blowing oak leaves caught me up and I was blown away.

I had other dreams of Gwyneth over the years, but as I grew up they became less frequent. In one, I was looking out my window toward the backyard at sunset. The geese were practicing a "V" formation for their fall migration. They honked past the barn, then turned and flew up over the house. As they passed near the window I saw a little girl with long blonde hair like mine streaming behind her as she rode one of them. Her laughter mixed with the honking and then they were gone.

Artwork by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

The moon began to rise over the barn then, casting shadows across the yard and snapping me out of my reverie. I grabbed the backpack and walked out without a backward glance. The baby made no sound, but turned his head to the side and stuck his thumb in his mouth. I avoided the squeaking stair on the way down and quietly latched the back door behind me.

Safely out on the porch I slipped the backpack on and waited for my eyes to adapt to the darkness. I knew the way. Gram had told me the stories, just as she had my father; stories of dances in the meadow when there was a ring around the moon, where the fairies would drink ale made of dew and dragonfly's milk, and leave rings of mushrooms in the grass in the morning. The stories could be funny or scary, but they seldom had a moral. Sometimes they reflected things I had seen in my dreams, but as an adult, I could never be sure in my memory which had come first.

The back porch creaked as I crossed it and I was glad we did not have a dog to bark and wake Tom. I thought of my childhood pet, Bryn, a red and white Welsh Corgi. Gram often made up stories about him. Corgis were the fairy horses, she said, and she showed me the lighter stripes of fur behind his front legs which were the marks left by the fairy saddles. Bryn liked to eat raspberries and would often disappear into the patch on a summer afternoon. We could tell where he was by the swaying of the stalks as he worked on them. Sometimes when I called him, he would appear out of the patch still smacking his lips. My father thought it weird to have a berry-loving dog. My mother was angry the time he over-ate and threw up on the good rug in the living room. But Gram understood. It's in his breeding, she told me. All corgis remember the way and are drawn to it, even if they never cross over.

Now I had to find the way. I crossed the open space of the yard quickly, seeking concealment in the shadow of the barn. The night air was cool, but thick with humidity. The sudden exertion made my breath heavy and my face moist. I made my way slowly now, listening to all the little night sounds, the constant background of crickets, the staccato peeping of tree frogs, the single hoot of an owl.

The raspberry patch loomed behind the barn, half in moonlight, half in

shadow, a single line of bushes grown tall and thick like a solid wall marking the property line and connecting barn to shed. It was an odd place to plant a berry patch, but it had always been there, maybe even before Gram's father built the barn. The darkness made the patch seem bigger, taller, more solid. I paused and doubted. An owl swooped from an apple tree behind me and over the barn making silent flight to the wood beyond, his shadow touching my shoulder. I stepped to the edge of the patch, found a thinner-looking spot, and pushed my way in.

The stalks were about five feet high, thick, prickly and sticky. I bent low, protecting my face and my passenger while pushing branches out of the way. Once inside it wasn't so bad. The stalks seemed to become larger and heavier, and not so close together.

The tangle finally parted and I stepped into the tall grass. The landscape looked both familiar and strange. The grass seemed higher and I realized that the raspberry stalks leaned over my head. The woods seemed closer, too, but perhaps it was just the moon behind them. A shaft of moonlight seemed to point a way across the silver-green grass to an opening in the trees. I took a deep breath and followed it.

Once in the woods, the darkness was complete. Tree trunks were black, leaves were black-green. The undergrowth made my feet disappear into blackness. Everything was quiet; there were no crickets now, just the soft shush-shush of my boots on the damp leaves and moss. I followed what I thought was a path until it ended. Everything looked the same no matter which way I turned. I felt a twinge of panic and put my hand on a tree to steady myself. To my right I thought I saw movement just in the corner of my eye. A light breeze brushed my face and lifted the stray hairs that always work themselves loose from my braid. In his carry pouch, the baby stirred. I looked at him without touching him. His fuzzy hair was the color of the moonlight. He turned in the direction of the breeze and stared.

"Is this the way?" I asked him, softly. He kicked and leaned in the direction of his unwavering gaze. I shivered slightly. "You know you're going home, don't you?" I whispered, as I followed the direction of the breeze.

I don't know how long I walked. The farther I went, the larger the trees seemed to be, as if I had become small again. The moon peeked through the canopy as the way became rocky and uphill. Though I had played in these woods often as a child, I did not remember this place. Overhead, a night bird called and I felt as if everything living was watching me.

The path became more level as it followed the high banks above a stream. I could barely hear the water gurgling below. The little forest floor plants that usually came to my knees were nearly to my waist. The trees were big as redwoods. Not-James rode silently, hugging Mr. Ugly.

To my left the trees grew thinner and I realized this stream must join the larger creek nearby. Ahead was the brightness of moonlight. Was this a dead end? Would I have to cross the water? I stepped to the edge of the bank and looked down. It was steep and studded with huge rocks and tree roots. Not-James looked down, too, and tried to stand by pushing his feet into my stomach.

I coughed and asked, "You see something down there?" He almost dropped Mr. Ugly and I tucked him back in. I turned back the other way, but the baby's gaze did not change. "So, we go that way?" I asked, putting my finger up by his outstretched hand and pointing. He grasped the finger, then looked up at me and kicked both feet. A herd of shivers galloped up my back. "OK," I said softly, and started looking for a way down.

I didn't hear him approach. I just rounded a tree and there he was, mounted on a corgi dog big as a Shetland pony. The corgi resembled my childhood Bryn with his large white nose and enormous ears. He wore a halter and saddle studded with what looked like those stones found in mood rings. The rider just stared at me. He was slight of build with black eyes and straight, white hair that flowed back from his forehead and past his shoulders. His clothes were dark but seemed to sparkle in the moonlight. His calf-high boots were lighter in color, with toes that came to a point and tops that folded over like petals.

"Who are you?" he said sharply, "How did you come here?"

I started to answer, but when I stepped from the shadow into the moonlight, the look of surprise and recognition on his face stopped me. I thought he was going to say something, but he didn't. The dog cocked its head and reached its nose forward to sniff. His rider jerked him back. The baby made a soft kittenlike noise. Now the stranger leaned forward to look at the baby and a new wave of astonishment swept over his face.

I swallowed hard and found my voice. "I think you know who I am," I said, evenly, "and if so, you must also know whom I have come to see."

He thought a moment, then reached out a hand. "Climb on," he said.

The dog picked its way around rocks and bounced over roots as we followed a twisting path down to a level area just above the stream. We followed the stream as the bank grew steeper above us. Little glowing flies danced above the water. The air smelled fresh, like it does after a rain. We started to climb again to where the twisted, exposed roots of the oak trees held the sandy soil in place with a thousand gnarled fingers. In three quick hops, the dog took us over the roots and around a corner.

Here the bank was bathed in moonlight and the water below sparkled. From nearby the sound of a flute blended in harmony with the water. My escort dismounted and helped me down. Then he bowed and before I could ask him anything, or even say thank you, he sprang back on the corgi and they bounded away. Not-James turned his head and spread his little fingers to steady himself as he leaned against me and tried to look over the roots ahead of us.

Then I heard it. A woman's voice humming a lullaby. I knew the voice, from my dreams from my memories. It turned my stomach into a stone. Not-James was very quiet. I took a deep breath, wiped my palms on my jeans and started to pick my way around and over the roots toward the sound.

It was a man that I met. I was coming around a tree and up a steep step, using both hands for balance. When I straightened up, there he stood above me, one foot on a root, silent and unmoving. He was dressed in dark green leggings and tunic with boots the color of tannin. His cloak was black as midnight, its edges indistinguishable from the spaces between the trees behind him. His straight, silver hair seemed to burst from his head and only gravity made its ends cascade over his ears and down to his shoulders like a fountain of moon-

light. A silver flute hung from his belt. There was no welcome in his green eyes. Behind him, the soft singing was the only sound in the forest.

"Go back," he said in a voice with an edge like shattered ice.

"I can't. I've come to ..."

"I know why you've come. Go back."

I took a breath and then bit my lower lip. We stood maybe four feet apart, neither of us moving, eyes locked. His were deep green, but they sparkled here and there with yellow lights, like a rich lawn in summer with a few dandelions in it. Where had I seen eyes like that before?

The baby stirred and I realized I was hugging him to me. When I released him, he pushed himself up with his little arms and cocked his head as if listening. Across from me, I thought I saw my opponent's mental armor crack.

I stepped around to the right and up so that we stood on the same level and tried again. "If you know why I've come ..."

"I will not let you hurt her."

"I don't want ..."

"You do not know the sorrow of seeing your children sicken and die."

"You want to let me finish a sentence? I ... What are you talking about?"

"Human though she is, I love her. And now we have our child and she is happy. The circle is complete and I will not let you break it." He raised his hand in a gesture I did not understand but had to stop.

"Wait a minute." I held my own hand up like a crossing guard signaling stop. "This is my baby and my sister you're talking about. I've come a long way to see them and I'm not going back until I do." My thoughts raced. "And I've brought your own son back to you. Don't you at least want to see him?"

He looked directly at the baby for the first time. I think it was a reflex. The baby looked up at him, too, and made a sound like a small bird, a single clear note that spoke symphonies. It echoed through all the empty places in my heart.

As it died away, it took all other sound with it, leaving the forest frozen in silence, frozen in time. How long it lasted, I don't know. The spell was broken when the baby kicked his feet and reached his arms out to his father, all the while making noises like a brook in a spring thaw.

His father's expression melted, but whatever emotions he felt were too complex to read. He took a step forward and reached out a tentative hand. The baby grasped a finger and smiled.

I had not seen Gwyneth approach, but suddenly she stood behind him. She wore a hooded cloak, green as spruce. Her hair fell over her shoulders like sunlight in the forest. There could be no doubt she was my sister. Her features were so like my own that I understood the corgi-rider's shock. We had the same deep blue eyes, too; our father's eyes, Gram's eyes. In her arms, she held something wrapped in a blanket the color of the midwinter sky.

She clutched her bundle tightly, panic in her eyes and her voice as she asked coldly, "Why have you come here?"

The bundle in her arms moved then and a little hand pushed the blanket aside. James fussed in his sleep as if he dreamed of being lost. The empty places collapsed inside me and the pain constricted my throat.

Her husband stepped aside so that Gwyneth could see Not-James, still grasping his finger. The anger slid from Gwyneth's face and a shocked surprise filled it. "Gareth?" she whispered. Then her eyes narrowed and she shook her head. "What trick is this?" she demanded. "He was failing, just like the others. There was no magic could save him."

"No trick," I said, forcing my own voice to stay even. "A bone-marrow transplant." They looked at me uncomprehending. "A close relative can sometimes donate healthy cells to strengthen the sick person's weak cells." I patted my hip. "We were a match."

His father looked at me with wonder. "Then you wove the thread of your own life with his? Knowing he was not yours?"

The lump in my throat was the size of a grapefruit, but I pushed the words out. "I think I knew he was my nephew."

Tears glistened in Gwyneth's eyes even as I felt my own start to overflow. Before I knew it, we were in each other's arms, a tangle of tears and babies, like a jigsaw puzzle that had had pieces missing but now could work itself together to form a perfect whole.

And so, in the midsummer, when families come together to celebrate with hot dogs and ice cream, fireworks and baseball, our family gathers, too. The parents visit on the porch and drink lemonade spiked with dew. The children eat raspberries from the bush with the dogs, then they dance with the fireflies in circles that leave rings of mushrooms on the lawn.

❄

Anna M. Cherry grew up on Florida's east coast, reading science fiction and watching the rockets launching from Cape Canaveral. She makes her living as a reference librarian, and she has written several fantasy/parody serials ("The Adventures of Conan the Librarian", "The Return of Conan the Librarian", and "Conan the Librarian on the Information Highway") for the *MALL Newsletter* (of the Minnesota Association of Law Libraries). "Changeling" is her first professional sale.

Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk has been working as a professional artist for over 15 years.

Artwork by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

LETTERS, cont. from p. 45

into the hands of people who would enjoy reading it, and to convince that reader to buy a copy. We have had numerous requests for posters, but we looked into it and decided that publishing and distributing posters was sufficiently different from our primary task, the magazine, that it wouldn't be feasible for us. Just for starters, we had three major concerns: posters need to be stored carefully or they become unsalable; posters are expensive to ship so that they reach the purchaser in perfect condition; posters are sold through different kinds of stores than those which sell books and magazines.

Your comment on dictionaries resonated with me; until we get the Oxford English Dictionary on CD-ROM for the office, I won't feel we have a truly adequate dictionary. Our current standard is the ***AMERICAN HERITAGE, ON*** *paper, since it's my favorite "regular" dictionary. I particularly like its usage discussions. But I admit that it lacks the specialized vocabulary found in fantasy fiction and words that are simply obscure: not only is geas missing, so are athame and sinople. — reh*

Rejected Manuscript in Ashes?

Bobette Bryan, Editor and Publisher of Underworld Magazine

Host of the Silver Quill Forum

I have a popular writers' forum on Delphi, called the Silver Quill Forum. It's the biggest writing group on the Net with more than 4,000 members.

Anyway, I'm writing to you because, quite frankly, I've heard many horror stories about you from my members. About a year ago, one of my members reported that you returned her manuscript to her in ashes, and the rest of us, of course, were sufficiently shocked. In fact, most of us decided that we'd never send a submission to you after hearing these stories.

But after reading some of the information on your website pertaining to writing, and more specifically to aspiring writers, I'm beginning to think that this impression I've formed of you simply doesn't add up. For instance, I read your article on why stories could get rejected, and this doesn't seem like the type of thing that someone who cared nothing for beginning writers would write and publish online. In fact, I thought it was an excellent article, and I intend to send my members to your page to read it. And who knows, some of them might see that you're not so bad after all. :-)

Thank you for your e-mail. I do know that Mrs. Bradley has a reputation for tactlessness, but I trust that whoever said her manuscript was returned "in ashes" was speaking metaphorically. I log the manuscripts in and out and put them into the SASEs myself, and I know I have never sent anyone a pile of ashes.

Mrs. Bradley has devoted a large part of her life during the 20 years I've known her to encouraging new writers, but she doesn't suffer fools gladly. (And after dealing with her slush pile, I can certainly understand why.) She says that a writer has to be both sensitive enough to write and tough enough to deal with rejection, because every writer's first experience is rejection.

It is important to remember that what is being rejected is words on paper, not yourself or your soul. Unfortunately, a lot of beginning writers (as well as all of the wanna-be types — the ones who want to be writers as opposed to wanting to write) confuse the two, They take rejection personally.

Mrs. Bradley bought my first story and encouraged me to become a professional writer. She rejected my most recent submission by saying that it was unfocused, and she was right about that too. I get to see the raw rejections, while everyone else is insulated from her somewhat by the fact that she no longer does the rejection letters personally. I do almost all of them, and I do make an effort to spare the writers' feelings.

Believe me, if Mrs. Bradley did not care deeply for beginning writers, she would not be publishing (at a considerable financial loss) a magazine designed to help these writers start their careers, nor would she be reading every manuscript in the slush pile herself.

Elisabeth Waters
Secretary to Mrs. Bradley

To write to us, send letters to Marion Zimmer Bradley, P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, California 94701, U.S.A., or sent us email at mzbfm@well.com. If you do not want your letter published, write "not for publication" on it somewhere; otherwise, yours might appear here!

MZB FM

Check out the *Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine* website!
http:/www.mzbfm.com

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THE LAST WORD

We need a good title. Here's the story: a woman wants to marry and all her father will give her as dowry is the land she can crawl around on her knees in a single night, dropping seeds to mark her progress. (Personally, I have wondered if it wouldn't be simpler for her to walk, but as Heinlein commented in one of his juveniles, where he recounts the entrance exams — which include opportunities for cheating — for a prestigious academy, "maybe what's being tested isn't what you think.") Currently the story's title is "Crawls", but until you know the synopsis, you might assume it's horror, or about worms, or bugs, or something creepy. So if you have any good suggestions, let me know, and I'll run them past the author to be sure she approves. The story I'm describing is going to be the cover a few issues from now, and it's by Susan Dexter. In the meantime, we have another Susan Dexter cover story, called "Butternut Ale", and it's being illustrated by the talented Omar Rayyan.

Another story coming up is "A Dear Gazelle" written by Elizabeth Wein, whose novel about Arthur's brother Mordred, **A WINTER PRINCE**, provided a sympathetic portrayal of both men. Wein's writing is a bit like Ursula LeGuin's, in that she conveys a convincing feel of "being there" to the reader in relatively few words. So we're pleased to offer a story of hers to our readers.

If you and your whole family were turned into crows — for part of each day — as punishment by an offended wizard, what could you do to solve the problem? That's the premise of "Crow Curse", being illustrated by Nick Jainschigg.

What if the fax machine was an evil witch? (You say, "But that's not even a fantasy. I have one of those in my office!) See our upcoming "Janitor's Closet" by Katherine Woodbury.

And Brad Foster, a well known artist, has contributed a delightful centerfold illo of the ultimate fannish book collection for a story called "The Library".

Westercon in Spokane was a delightful convention. My manuscript preparation workshop was well-attended and, I hope, productive for those who came. There was Regency Dancing and a nice fireworks display, viewed from the suite where the Foolscap convention was holding a publicity party. Some of the best panels were lightly attended; only half a dozen people got to hear Dean Smith talk about how the Gulf War killed Pulphouse Publishing, and how Dean conned Fine Print, his distributor, into paying its bill before it went bankrupt; and Ellen Datlow described the fall of the online version of OMNI, due primarily to the parent company's inability to understand how to make money on the Internet. One of my favorite moments was when Algis Budrys, one of the guests of honor, autographed a small chapbook he'd written and gave it to me. Unfortunately, my panel schedule never included any where he was also a participant.

Marion's editorial about discipline impressed me partly because I know she speaks from experience. These days, she's not a well woman; she has congestive heart failure (poor circulation plus difficulty in breathing) and diabetes, including eye problems that make it difficult for her to read - diabetic retinopathy, for those who want the exact diagnosis. Yet she reads manuscripts nearly every day (those not too faint for her to see — those get my comments only); this week it's not only those for the magazine but those for the next Sword & Sorceress anthology. When I mentioned that an editorial was needed, she immediately dictated one into my tape recorder, and added a reply to the letter asking what a "shared world" story was.

In this era of celebrity endorsements, few people expect that the celebrities in question are actually involved in the product they endorse. Paul Newman is perhaps the only exception, with his spaghetti-sauce and salad-dressing business. But Marion actually reads every manuscript, and determines if she thinks it's one she wants to publish. Then I read all of them, paying special attention to the ones she's marked for the "hold" pile, but also adding a few choices of my own. Then she and I discuss them, how they'll fit into the lineups; which stories are good but perhaps too similar to other stories we already have. The ultimate purchase decision for each story is hers. She also goes over the letter column for each issue and approves each one. So both of us hope you continue to enjoy the stories in this magazine, and the fine illustrations sent to us by our talented artists.

— *Rachel E. Holmen*

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DIGITAL
LITERATURE

Some stories are better left unread.
At least, if you want to sleep at night.

October is Spooky Story month at Alexandria.

Featuring stories by
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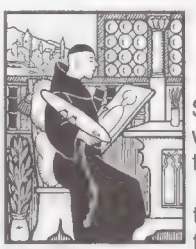

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Its primary goal of ASFA is to share information that is of value to artists and art appreciators. Membership costs $18.00 a year, payable to ASFA, P.O. Box 151442, Arlington TX 76015, and includes their quarterly newsletter.

Princess of Flowers • Margaret Davis

This latest release from Flowinglass Music takes the listener on a fabulous journey to the times of the Troubadours, Knights, and Ladies. Margaret Davis's debut recording features her shimmeringly beautiful singing accompanied by the magical interplay of Celtic harp, acoustic guitar, mandola, cello, recorders, hurdy-gurdy, percussion, and the Medieval vielle. This atmospherically lovely CD features Margaret's original arrangements of Celtic folk songs, Renaissance dances, and Medieval troubadour melodies. The lyrics, including some in French, Latin, and Gaelic, speak of love and longing, quests and revels, magic and transformation in an evocative style that will transport and enchant you. Fans of Loreena McKennitt, Enya, and Maire Brennan will enjoy this exciting recording. Experience the magic!

TRACK LIST:

Princess of Flowers
Douce Dame Jolie
I Once Loved a Lad
Tha Mi Sgith
Childgrove/Parson's Farewell/Horse's Bransle
Edi Beo Thu
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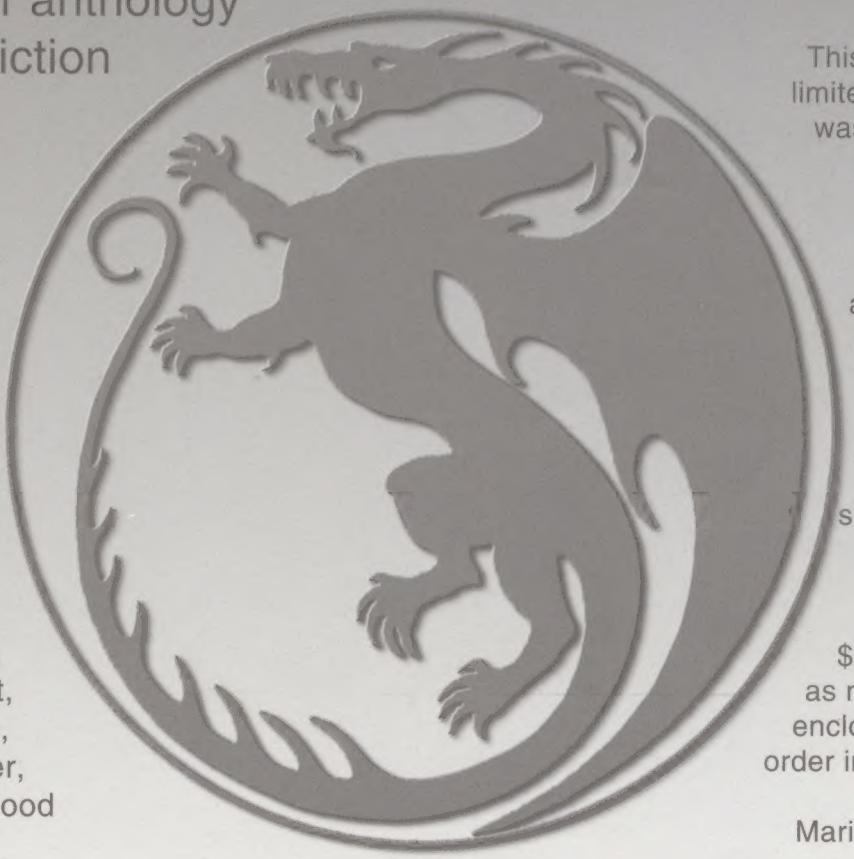

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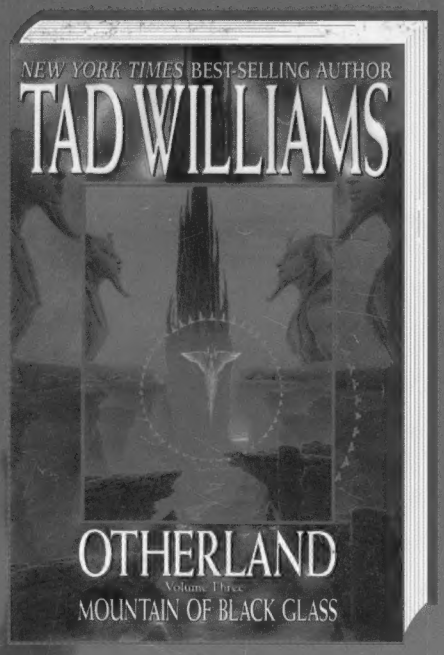

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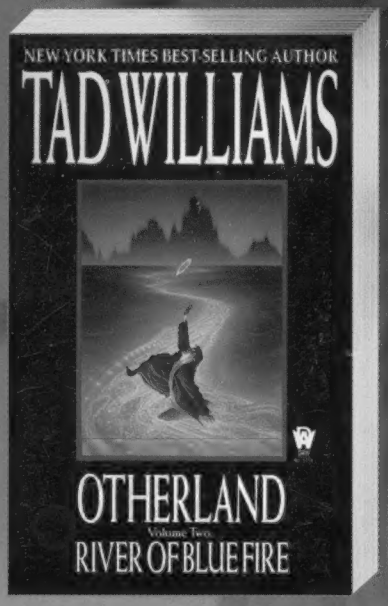

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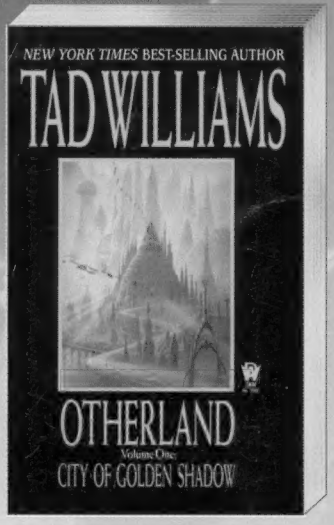

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